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Five Somewhat Historical Plays

By
Philip Moeller



New York
Alfred A. Knopf
MCMXVIII

**Five
Somewhat Historical
Plays**



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Three mms

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HELENA'S HUSBAND
An Historical Comedy

*To my friends in the Washington Square Players,
my interpreters, my critics, and still my friends.*

THE CHARACTERS

HELENA, *the queen.*

TSUMU, *a black woman, slave to Helena.*

MENELAUS, *the king.*

ANALYTIKOS, *the king's librarian.*

PARIS, *a shepherd.*

HELENA'S HUSBAND

THE SCENE

Is that archeological mystery, a Greek interior. A door on the right leads to the king's library, one on the left to the apartments of the Queen. Back right is the main entrance leading to the palace. Next this, running the full length of the wall, is a window with a platform, built out over the main court. Beyond is a view of hills, bright with lemon groves, and in the far distance shimmers the sea. On the wall near the Queen's room hangs an old shield rusty with disuse. There are low coffers about the room from which hang the ends of vivid coloured robes. The scene is bathed in intense sunlight. TSUMU is massaging the Queen.

HELENA. There's no doubt about it.

TSUMU. Analytikos says there is much doubt about all things.

HELENA. Never mind what he says. I envy you your complexion.

TSUMU. (*Falling prostrate before HELENA*)
Whom the queen envies should beware.

HELENA. (*Annoyed*) Get up, Tsumu. You make me nervous tumbling about like that.

TSUMU. (*Still on the floor*) Why does the great queen envy Tsumu?

HELENA. Get up, you silly. (*She kicks her*) I envy you because you can run about and never worry about getting sunburnt.

TSUMU. (*On her knees*) The radiant beauty of the queen is unspoilable.

HELENA. That's just what's worrying me, Tsumu. When beauty is so perfect the slightest jar may mean a jolt.

(*She goes over and looks at her reflections
in the shield*)

I can't see myself as well as I would like to. His shield is tarnished. Menelaus has been too long out of battle.

TSUMU. (*Handing her a hand mirror*) The Gods will keep Sparta free from strife.

HELENA. I'll have you beaten if you assume that prophetic tone with me. There's one thing I can't stand and that's a know-all. (*Flinging the hand mirror to the floor*)

TSUMU. (*In alarm*) Gods grant you haven't broken it.

HELENA. These little mirrors are useless. His shield is the only thing in which I can see myself full-length.

TSUMU. (*Putting the broken mirror on a table near the QUEEN*) The king is a lover of peace.

HELENA. The king is a lover of comfort.

Have you noticed that he spends more time than he used to in his library?

TSUMU. He is busy with questions of state.

HELENA. You know perfectly well that when anything's the matter with the government it's always straightened out at the other end of the palace. Finish my shoulder.

(She examines her arm)

I doubt if there is a finer skin than this in Sparta.

TSUMU. *(Begins to massage the Queen's shoulder)*

HELENA. *(Taking up the mirror)* That touch of deep carmine right here in the centre of my lips was quite an idea.

TSUMU. *(Busily pounding the Queen)* An inspiration of the Gods!

HELENA. The Gods have nothing to do with it. I copied it from a low woman I saw at the circus. I can't understand how these bad women have such good ideas.

(HELENA twists about)

TSUMU. If your majesty doesn't sit still, I may pinch you.

HELENA. *(Boxing her ears)* None of your tricks, you ebony fiend!

TSUMU. *(Crouching)* Descendant of paradise, forgive me.

HELENA. If you bruise my perfect flesh, the king will kill you. My beauty is his religion. He

can sit for hours, as if at prayer, just examining the arch of my foot. Tsumu, you may kiss my foot.

TSUMU. (*Prostrate*) May the Gods make me worthy of your kindness!

HELENA. Tsumu, are you married?

TSUMU. (*Getting up*) I've been so busy having babies that I never had time to get married.

HELENA. It's a great disillusionment.

TSUMU. (*Aghast*) What!

HELENA. I'm not complaining. Moo Moo is the best of husbands but sometimes being adored too much is trying. (*She sighs deeply*) I think I'll wear my heliotrope this afternoon.

(*A trumpet sounds below in the courtyard. Tsumu goes to the window*)

TSUMU. They are changing the guards at the gates of the Palace. It's almost time for your bath.

(*She begins scraping the massage ointment back into the box.*)

HELENA. You're as careful with that ointment as Moo Moo is with me.

TSUMU. Precious things need precious guarding.

HELENA. It's very short-sighted on Moo Moo's part to send anybody to the galleys who dares lift a head when I pass by,— and all those nice looking soldiers! Why,— the only men I ever see besides Moo Moo are Analytikos and a lot of useless eunuchs.

(*She sits dreaming*)

TSUMU. (*Despondently*) O, those eunuchs!

HELENA. I wish, I wish —

(*She stops short*)

TSUMU. You have but to speak your desire to the King.

HELENA. (*Shocked*) Tsumu! How can you think of such a thing? I'm not a bad woman.

TSUMU. He would die for you.

HELENA. (*Relieved*) Ah! Do you think so, Tsumu?

TSUMU. All Sparta knows that his majesty is a lover of peace and yet he would rush into battle to save you.

HELENA. I should love to have men fighting for me.

TSUMU. (*In high alarm*) May Zeus turn a deaf ear to your voice.

HELENA. Don't be impertinent, Tsumu. I've got to have some sort of amusement.

TSUMU. You've only to wait till next Thursday and you can see another of the priestesses sacrificed to Diana.

HELENA. That doesn't interest me any longer. The girls are positively beginning to like it. No! My mind is set on war.

TSUMU. I have the five fathers of my children to lose.

HELENA. War, or — or —

TSUMU. (*Hopefully*) Have I been so long

your slave that I may no longer know your wish?

HELENA. (*Very simply*) Well, I should like to have a lover.

TSUMU. (*Springs up and rushes over in horror to draw the curtains across the door to the library. All of a tremble*) May the Gods forbid that they should hear you.

HELENA. Don't be alarmed, Tsumu. Analytikos is over eighty.

(*She bursts into a loud peal of laughter and MENELAUS rushes into the room*)

MENELAUS. (*In high irritation*) A king might at least expect quiet in his own palace. I wish you wouldn't make so much noise in here.

HELENA. Tsumu, see if my bath is ready.

(*TSUMU exits*)

You used not speak like that to me, Moo Moo.

MENELAUS. (*In a temper*) How many times must I tell you that my name is Menelaus and that it isn't "Moo Moo"?

HELENA. (*Sweetly*) I'll never do it again, Moo Moo. (*She giggles*)

MENELAUS. Your laugh gets on my nerves. It's louder than it used to be.

HELENA. If you wish it, I'll never laugh again.

MENELAUS. You've promised that too often.

HELENA. (*Sadly*) Things are not as they used to be.

MENELAUS. Are you going to start that again?

HELENA. (*With a tinge of melancholy*) I suppose you'd like me to be still and sad.

MENELAUS. (*Bitterly*) Is it too much to hope that you might be still and happy?

HELENA. (*Speaking very quickly and tragically*) Don't treat me cruelly, Moo Moo. You don't understand me. No man can ever really understand a woman. There are terrible depths to my nature. I had a long talk with Dr. Æsculapius only last week. He told me I'm too introspective. It's the curse of us emotional women. I'm really quite worried, but much you care, much you care.

(*A note of tears comes into her voice*)

I'm sure you don't love me any more, Moo Moo. No! No! Don't answer me! If you did you couldn't speak to me the way you do. I've never wronged you in deed or in thought. No, never — never. I've given up my hopes and aspirations, because I knew you wanted me around you. And now, now —

(*She can contain the tears no longer*)

because I have neglected my beauty and because I am old and ugly you regret that Ulysses or Agamemnon didn't marry me when you all wanted me, and I know you curse the day you ever saw me.

(*She is breathless*)

MENELAUS. (*Fuming*) Well! Have you done?

HELENA. No. I could say a great deal more, but I'm not a talkative woman.

(ANALYTIKOS comes in from the library)

ANALYTIKOS. Your majesty, are we to read no longer today?

HELENA. I have something to say to the king.

(ANALYTIKOS goes towards the library.

MENELAUS anxiously stops him)

MENELAUS. No. Stay here. You are a wise man and will understand the wisdom of the queen.

ANALYTIKOS. (*Bowing to HELENA*) Helena is wise as she is beautiful.

MENELAUS. She is attempting to prove to me in a thousand words that she is a silent woman.

ANALYTIKOS. Women are seldom silent.

(HELENA resents this)

Their beauty is forever speaking for them.

HELENA. The years have, indeed, taught you wisdom.

(TSUMU enters)

TSUMU. The almond water awaits your majesty.

HELENA. I hope you haven't forgotten the chiropodist.

TSUMU. He has been commanded but he's always late. He's so busy.

HELENA. (*Purringly to MENELAUS*) Moo Moo!

(MENELAUS, bored, turns away)

HELENA. (*To TSUMU*) I think, after all, I'll wear my Sicily blue.

(She and TSUMU go into the Queen's apartment)

ANALYTIKOS. Shall we go back to the library?

MENELAUS. My mind is unhinged again — that woman with her endless protestations.

ANALYTIKOS. I am sorry the poets no longer divert you.

MENELAUS. A little poetry is always too much.

ANALYTIKOS. Tomorrow we will try the historians.

MENELAUS. No! Not the historians. I want the truth for a change.

ANALYTIKOS. The truth!

MENELAUS. Where in books can I find escape from the grim reality of being hitched for life to such a wife? Bah!

ANALYTIKOS. Philosophy teaches —

MENELAUS. Why have the Gods made woman necessary to man, and made them fools?

ANALYTIKOS. For seventy years I have been resolving the problem of woman and even at my age —

MENELAUS. Give it up, Analytikos.

ANALYTIKOS. Such endless variety of women and yet —

MENELAUS. *(With the conviction of finality)*
There are only two sorts of women! Those who are failures and those who realize it.

ANALYTIKOS. Is not Penelope, the perfect wife of your cousin Ulysses, an exception?

MENELAUS. Duty is the refuge of the unbeautiful. She is as commonplace as she is ugly. (*And then with deep bitterness*) Why didn't he marry Helen when we all wanted her. He was too wise for that. He is the only man I've ever known who seems able to direct destiny.

ANALYTIKOS. You should not blame the Gods for lack of will.

MENELAUS. (*Shouting*) Will! Heaven knows I do not lack the will to rid myself of this painted puppet, but where is the instrument ready to my hand?

(*At this moment a shepherd of Apollonian beauty leaps across the rail of the balcony and bounds into the room. MENELAUS and ANALYTIKOS start back in amazement*)

ANALYTIKOS. Who are you?

PARIS. An adventurer.

ANALYTIKOS. Then you have reached the end of your story. In a moment you will die.

PARIS. I have no faith in prophets.

ANALYTIKOS. The soldiers of the king will give you faith. Don't you know that it means death for any man to enter the apartments of the queen?

PARIS. (*Looking from one to the other*) Oh! So you're a couple of eunuchs.

(*Though nearly eighty, this is too much*)

for ANALYTIKOS to hear. He rushes to call the guards, but MENELAUS stops him)

PARIS. (*To ANALYTIKOS*) Thanks.

ANALYTIKOS. You thank me for telling you your doom?

PARIS. No! — for convincing me that I'm where I want to be. It's taken me a long while, but I knew I'd get here. Where's the queen?

MENELAUS. Where do you come from?

PARIS. From the hills. I had come into the market place to sell my sheep. I had my hood filled with apples. They were golden red like a thousand sunsets.

MENELAUS. You might skip those bucolic details.

PARIS. At the fair I met three ancient gipsies.

MENELAUS. What have they to do with you coming here?

PARIS. You don't seem very patient. Can't I tell my story in my own way? They asked me for the apple I was eating and I asked them what they'd give for it.

MENELAUS. I'm not interested in market quotations.

PARIS. You take everything so literally. I'm sure you're easily bored.

MENELAUS. (*With meaning*) I am.

PARIS. (*Going on cheerfully*) The first was to give me all the money she could beg and the second

was to tell me all the truth she could learn by listening, and the third promised me a pretty girl. So I chose — (*He hesitates*)

ANALYTIKOS. You cannot escape by spinning out your tale.

PARIS. Death is the end of one story and the beginning of another.

MENELAUS. Well! Well! Come to the point. Which did you choose?

PARIS. (*Smiling*) You see I'd been in the hills a long while, so I picked the girl.

ANALYTIKOS. It would have been better for you if you had chosen wisdom.

PARIS. I knew you'd say that.

ANALYTIKOS. I have spoken truly. In a moment you will die.

PARIS. It is because the old have forgotten life that they preach wisdom.

MENELAUS. So you chose the girl? Well, go on.

PARIS. This made the other cronies angry and when I tossed her the apple one of the others yelped at me: "You may as well seek the queen of Sparta: she is the fairest of women." And as I turned away I heard their laughter, but the words had set my heart aflame and though it costs me my life, I'll follow the adventure.

ANALYTIKOS. Haven't we heard enough of this?

MENELAUS. No! — I want to hear how the story ends. It may amuse the king.

(*He makes a sign to ANALYTIKOS*)

PARIS. And on the ship at night I looked at the stars and dreamed of possessing Helen.

(*ANALYTIKOS makes an involuntary movement towards the balcony but MENELAUS stops him*)

Desire has been my guiding Mercury, the Fates are with me, and here I am!

ANALYTIKOS. The wrath of the king will show you no mercy.

PARIS. (*Nonchalantly*) I'm not afraid of the king. He's fat, and — a fool.

ANALYTIKOS. Shall I call the guards?

(*MENELAUS again stops him*)

MENELAUS. (*Very significantly*) So you would give your life for a glimpse of the queen.

PARIS. (*Swiftly*) Yes! My immortal soul, and if the fables tell the truth, the sight will be worth the forfeit.

MENELAUS. (*Suddenly jumping up*) It shall be as you wish!

PARIS. (*Buoyantly*) Venus has smiled on me!

MENELAUS. In there beyond the library you will find a room with a bath. Wait there till I call you.

PARIS. Is this some trick to catch me?

MENELAUS. A Spartan cannot lie.

PARIS. What will happen to you if the king hears of this?

MENELAUS. I will answer for the king. Go!

(PARIS *exits into the library*)

ANALYTIKOS. Shall I order the boiling oil?

MENELAUS. Oil?

ANALYTIKOS. Now that he is being cleaned for the sacrifice.

MENELAUS. His torture will be greater than being boiled alive.

ANALYTIKOS. You'll have him hurled from the walls of the palace to a forest of waiting spears.

MENELAUS. None is so blind as he who sees too much.

ANALYTIKOS. Your majesty is subtle in his cruelty.

MENELAUS. Haven't the years taught you the cheapness of revenge?

ANALYTIKOS. You do not intend to alter destiny.

MENELAUS. Never before has destiny been so clear to me.

ANALYTIKOS. Then the boy must die.

MENELAUS. No! He has been sent by the Gods to save me!

ANALYTIKOS. Your majesty!

(*He is trembling with apprehension*)

MENELAUS. (*With unbudgeable conviction*)
Helena must elope with him!

ANALYTIKOS. (*Falling into a seat*) Ye Gods!

MENELAUS. I couldn't divorce the queen.
That would set a bad example.

ANALYTIKOS. Yes, very.

MENELAUS. I couldn't desert her. That would be beneath my honour.

ANALYTIKOS. (*Deeply*) Was there no other way?

MENELAUS. (*Pompously*) The king can do no wrong and besides I hate the smell of blood. Are you a prophet as well as a scholar? Will she go?

ANALYTIKOS. Tonight I will read the stars.

MENELAUS. By tonight I'll not need you to tell me.

(ANALYTIKOS *sits in deep thought.*)

Well? —

ANALYTIKOS. Ethics cites no precedent.

MENELAUS. Do you mean to say I'm not justified?

ANALYTIKOS. (*Cogitating*) Who can establish the punctilious ratio between necessity and desire?

MENELAUS. (*Beginning to fume*) This is no time for language. Just put yourself in my place.

ANALYTIKOS. Being you, how can I judge as I?

MENELAUS. (*Losing control*) May you choke on you dialectics! Zeus himself could have stood it no longer.

ANALYTIKOS. Have you given her soul a chance to grow?

MENELAUS. Her soul, indeed! It's shut in her rouge pot.

(He has been strutting about. Suddenly he sits down crushing a roll of papyrus. He takes it up and in utter disgust reads.)

"The perfect hip, its development and permanence." Bah!

(He flings it to the floor)

I've done what I had to do, and Gods grant the bait may be sweet enough to catch the queen.

ANALYTIKOS. If you had diverted yourself with a war or two you might have forgotten your troubles at home.

MENELAUS. I detest dissension of any kind. My dream was perpetual peace in comfortable domesticity with a womanly woman to warm my sandals.

ANALYTIKOS. Is not the queen? —

MENELAUS. No! No! The whole world is but her mirror. I'm expected to face that woman every morning at breakfast for the rest of my life and by Venus that's more than even a king can bear!

ANALYTIKOS. Even a king cannot alter destiny. I warn you, whom the Gods have joined together —

MENELAUS. *(In an outburst)* Is for man to break asunder!

ANALYTIKOS. *(Deeply shocked)* You talk like an atheist.

MENELAUS. I never allow religion to interfere with life. Go call the victim and see that he be left alone with the queen.

(MENELAUS *exits* and ANALYTIKOS *goes over to the door of the library and summons PARIS, who enters clad in a gorgeous robe.*)

PARIS. I found this in there. It looks rather well doesn't it? Ah! So you're alone. I suppose that stupid friend of yours has gone to tell the king. When do I see the queen?

ANALYTIKOS. At once!

(*He goes to the door of the queen's apartment and claps his hands. TSUMU enters and at the sight of her PARIS recoils the full length of the room*)

PARIS. I thought the queen was blonde!

ANALYTIKOS. Tell her majesty a stranger awaits her here. (TSUMU *exits* her eyes wide on PARIS) You should thank the Gods for this moment.

PARIS. (*His eyes on the door*) You do it for me. I can never remember all their names.

(HELENA *enters clad in her Sicily blue with a garland of golden flowers. She and PARIS stand riveted looking at one another. Their attitude might be described as fatalistic. ANALYTIKOS watches them for a moment and then with hands and head lifted to Heaven he goes into the library.*)

PARIS. I have the most strange sensation of having seen you before. Something I can't explain —

HELENA. Please don't bother about all sorts of fine distinctions. Under the influence of Analytikos and my husband, life has become a mess of indecision. I'm a simple, direct woman and I expect you to say just what you think.

PARIS. Do you? Very well then —

(He comes a step nearer to her)

Fate is impelling me towards you.

HELENA. Yes. That's much better. So you're a fatalist. It's very Greek. I don't see what our dramatists would do without it.

PARIS. In my country there are no dramatists. We are too busy with reality.

HELENA. Your people must be uncivilized barbarians.

PARIS. My people are a genuine people. There is but one thing we worship.

HELENA. Don't tell me it's money.

PARIS. It's —

HELENA. Analytikos says if there weren't any money, there wouldn't be any of those ridiculous socialists.

PARIS. It isn't money. It's sincerity.

HELENA. I, too, believe in sincerity. It's the loveliest thing in the world.

PARIS. And the most dangerous.

HELENA. The truth is never dangerous.

PARIS. Except when told.

HELENA. You mustn't say wicked things to me.

PARIS. Can your theories survive a test?

HELENA. (*Beautifully*) Truth is eternal and survives all tests.

PARIS. (*Deeply*) Does it?

HELENA. What do you mean?

PARIS. No. Perhaps, after all, your soul is not ready for the supremest heights.

HELENA. Do you mean to say I'm not religious? Religion teaches the meaning of love.

PARIS. Has it taught you to love your husband?

HELENA. (*Starting up and immediately sitting down again*) How dare you speak to me like that?

PARIS. You see. I was right.

(*He goes towards the door*)

HELENA. (*Stopping him*) Whatever made you think so?

PARIS. I've heard people talk of the king. You could never love a man like that.

HELENA. A woman's first duty is to love her husband.

PARIS. There is a higher right than duty.

HELENA. (*With conviction*) Right is right.

PARIS. (*With admiration*) The world has libelled you.

HELENA. Me! The Queen?

PARIS. You are as wise as you are beautiful.

HELENA. Why you hardly know me.

PARIS. I know you! I, better than all men.

HELENA. You?

PARIS. (*Rapturously*) Human law has given you to Menelaus but divine law makes you mine.

HELENA. (*In amazement*) What!

PARIS. I alone appreciate your beauty. I alone can reach your soul.

HELENA. Ah!

PARIS. You hate your husband!

HELENA. (*Drawing back*) Why do you look at me like that?

PARIS. To see if there's one woman in the world who dares tell the truth.

HELENA. My husband doesn't understand me.

PARIS. (*With conviction*) I knew you detested him.

HELENA. He never listens to my aspirations.

PARIS. Egoist.

HELENA. (*Assuming an irresistible pose*) I'm tired of being only lovely. He doesn't realize the meaning of spiritual intercourse, of soul communion.

PARIS. Fool!

HELENA. You dare call Moo Moo a fool?

PARIS. Has he not been too blind to see that your soul outshines your beauty?

(Then, very dramatically)

You're stifling!

HELENA. *(Clearing her throat)* I—I—

PARIS. He has made you sit upon your wings.

(HELENA jumping up shifts her position)

You are groping in the darkness.

HELENA. Don't be silly. It's very light in here.

PARIS. *(Undisturbed)* You are stumbling and I have come to lead you.

(He steps towards her)

HELENA. Stop right there!

(PARIS stops)

No man but the king can come within ten feet of me. It's a court tradition.

PARIS. Necessity knows no tradition.

(He falls on his knees before her)

I shall come close to you, though the flame of your beauty consume me.

HELENA. You better be careful what you say to me. Remember I'm the queen.

PARIS. No man weighs his words who has but a moment to live.

HELENA. You said that exactly like an actor.

(He leans very close to her)

What are you doing now?

PARIS. I am looking into you. You are the clear glass in which I read the secret of the universe.

HELENA. The secret of the universe. Perhaps you could understand me.

PARIS. First you must understand yourself.

HELENA. (*Instinctively taking up a mirror*)
How?

PARIS. You must break with all this prose.

(*With an unconscious gesture he sweeps
a tray of toilet articles from the table.*)

HELENA emits a little shriek)

HELENA. The ointment!

PARIS. (*Rushing to the window and pointing to
the distance*) And climb to infinite poetry.

HELENA. (*Catching his enthusiasm, says very
blandly*) There is nothing in the world like
poetry.

PARIS. (*Lyricaly*) Have you ever heard the
poignant breathing of the stars?

HELENA. No. I don't believe in astrology.

PARIS. Have you ever smelt the powdery mists
of the sun?

HELENA. I should sneeze myself to death.

PARIS. Have you ever listened to the sapphire
soul of the sea?

HELENA. Has the sea a soul? But please don't
stop talking. You do it so beautifully.

PARIS. Deeds are sweeter than words. Shall
we go hand in hand to meet eternity?

HELENA. (*Not comprehending him*) That's
very pretty. Say it again.

.

PARIS. (*Passionately*) There's but a moment of life left me. I shall stifle it in ecstasy. Helena, Helena, I adore you!

HELENA. (*Jumping up in high surprise*) You're not making love to me!

PARIS. Helena.

HELENA. You've spoken to me so little and already you dare to do that.

PARIS. I am a lover of life. I skip the in-essentials.

HELENA. Remember who I am.

PARIS. I have not forgotten, daughter of Heaven.

(*Suddenly he leaps to his feet*)

Listen!

HELENA. Shhh! That's the king and Analytikos in the library.

PARIS. No! No! Don't you hear the flutter of wings?

HELENA. Wings?

PARIS. (*Ecstatically*) Venus, mother of Love!

HELENA. What is it?

PARIS. She has sent her messenger. I hear the patter of little feet.

HELENA. Those little feet are the soldiers below in the courtyard.

PARIS. (*The truth of the situation breaking*

through his emotion) In a moment I shall be killed.

HELENA. Killed?

PARIS. Save me and save yourself!

HELENA. Myself?

PARIS. I shall rescue you and lead you on to life.

HELENA. No one has ever spoken to me like that before.

PARIS. This is the first time your ears have heard the truth.

HELENA. Was it of you I've been dreaming?

PARIS. Your dream was but your unrealized desire. (*She is in his arms*)

HELENA. Menelaus has never made me feel like this.

(*And then with a sudden shriek*)

Oh! I'm a wicked woman!

PARIS. No! No!

HELENA. For years I've been living with a man I didn't love.

PARIS. Yes! Yes!

HELENA. I'm lost!

PARIS. (*At a loss*) No! Yes! Yes! No!

HELENA. It was a profanation of the most holy.

PARIS. The holiest awaits you, Helena! Our love will lighten the Plutonian realms.

HELENA. Menelaus never spoke to me like that.

PARIS. 'Tis but the first whisper of my adoration.

HELENA. I can't face him every morning at breakfast for the rest of my life. That's even more than a queen can bear.

PARIS. I am waiting to release you.

HELENA. I've stood it for seven years.

PARIS. I've been coming to you since the beginning of time.

HELENA. There is something urging me to go with you, something I do not understand.

PARIS. Quick! There is but a moment left us.

*(He takes her rapturously in his arms.
There is a passionate embrace, in the midst
of which TSUMU enters)*

TSUMU. The chiropodist has come.

HELENA. Bring me my outer garment and my purse.

(TSUMU exits her eyes wide on PARIS)

PARIS. Helena! Helena!

*(HELENA looks about her and takes up
the papyrus that MENELAUS has flung to the
floor)*

HELENA. A last word to the king.

(She looks at the papyrus)

No, this won't do I shall have to take this with me.

PARIS. What is it?

HELENA. Maskanda's discourse on the hip.

PARIS. (*Excitedly*) Leave it — or your hip may cost me my head. We haven't a minute to spare. Hurry! Hurry!

(HELENA *takes up an eyebrow pencil and writes on the back of the papyrus. She looks for a place to put it and seeing the shield she smears it with some of the ointment and sticks the papyrus to it*)

PARIS. (*Watching her in ecstasy*) You are the fairest of all fair women and your name will blaze as a symbol throughout eternity.

(*In the midst of another passionate embrace* TSUMU *enters with the purse and the toga*)

TSUMU. (*Laconically*) Here's your pocket-book.

HELENA. (*Tossing the purse to PARIS*) Here, we may need this.

PARIS. (*Throwing it back to TSUMU*) This for your silence, daughter of darkness. A prince has no need of purses.

TSUMU. (*Looking at him*) A Prince!

HELENA. (*Gloriously*) My prince of poetry. My deliverer!

PARIS. (*Divinely*) My queen of love!

(*They rush out, TSUMU looking after them in speechless amazement. Suddenly*

she sees the papyrus on the shield, runs over and reads it and then runs to the door of the library)

TSUMU (*Calling*) Analytikos.

(She hides the purse in her bosom. ANALYTIKOS enters, scroll in hand)

ANALYTIKOS. Has the queen summoned me?

TSUMU. (*Mysteriously*) A terrible thing has happened.

ANALYTIKOS. What's the matter?

TSUMU. Where's the king?

ANALYTIKOS. In the library.

TSUMU. I have news more precious than the gold of Midas.

ANALYTIKOS. (*Giving her a purse*) Well! What is it?

TSUMU. (*Speaking very dramatically and watching the effect of her words*) The queen has deserted Menelaus.

ANALYTIKOS. (*Receiving the shock philosophically*) Swift are the ways of Nature. The Gods have smiled upon him.

TSUMU. The Gods have forsaken the king to smile upon a prince.

ANALYTIKOS. What?

TSUMU. He was a prince.

ANALYTIKOS. (*Apprehensively*) Why do you say that?

TSUMU. (*Clutching her bosom*) I have a good reason to know.

(*There is a sound of voices below in the courtyard. MENELAUS rushes in expectantly. TSUMU falls prostrate before him*)

Oh King, in thy bottomless agony blame not a blameless negress. The queen has fled!

MENELAUS. (*In his delight forgetting himself and flinging her a purse*)

Is it true?

TSUMU. Woe! Woe is me!

MENELAUS. (*Storming*) Out of my sight you eyeless Argus!

ANALYTIKOS. (*To TSUMU*) Quick, send a messenger. Find out who he was.

(*TSUMU sticks the third purse in her bosom and runs out*)

MENELAUS. (*With radiant happiness*) Ye Gods, I thank thee. Peace and a happy life at last.

(*The shouts in the courtyard grow louder*)

ANALYTIKOS. The news has spread through the palace.

MENELAUS. (*In trepidation*) No one would dare stop the progress of the queen.

TSUMU. (*Rushes in and prostrates herself before the king*) Woe is me! They have gone by the road to the harbour.

MENELAUS. (*Anxiously*) Yes! Yes!

TSUMU. By the king's orders no man has dared gaze upon her majesty. They all fell prostrate before her.

MENELAUS. Good! Good!

(Then attempting to cover his delight)

Go! Go! You, garrulous dog.

(TSUMU gets up and points to shield.

ANALYTIKOS and the king look towards it.

ANALYTIKOS tears off the papyrus and brings it to MENELAUS. TSUMU exits)

MENELAUS. *(Reading)* "I am not a bad woman. I did what I had to do." How Greek to blame fate for what one wants to do.

(TSUMU again comes tumbling in)

TSUMU. *(Again prostrate before the King)*
A rumour flies through the city. He — He —

ANALYTIKOS. *(Anxiously)* Well? Well?

TSUMU. He — He —

MENELAUS. *(Furiously to ANALYTIKOS)* Rid me of this croaking raven.

TSUMU. Evil has fallen on Sparta. He —

ANALYTIKOS. Yes — Yes —

MENELAUS. *(In a rage)* Out of my sight, perfidious Nubian!

(Sounds of confusion in the courtyard.

Suddenly she springs to her feet and shrieks at the top of her voice)

TSUMU. He was Paris, Prince of Troy!

(*They all start back.* ANALYTIKOS
stumbles into a seat. MENELAUS turns
pale. TSUMU leers like a black Nemesis)

ANALYTIKOS. (*Very ominously*) Who can
read the secret of the fates?

MENELAUS. (*Frightened*) What do you
mean?

ANALYTIKOS. He is the son of Priam, King of
Troy.

TSUMU. (*Adding fuel*) And of Hecuba,
Queen of the Trojans.

(*She rushes out to spread the news*)

ANALYTIKOS. That makes the matter interna-
tional.

MENELAUS. But we have treaties with Troy.

ANALYTIKOS. Circumstances alter treaties.
They will mean nothing.

MENELAUS. Nothing?

ANALYTIKOS. No more than a scrap of papyrus.
Sparta will fight to regain her queen.

MENELAUS. But I don't want her back.

ANALYTIKOS. Can you tell that to Sparta? Re-
member the King can do no wrong. Last night I
dreamed of war.

MENELAUS. No! No! Don't say that.
After the scandal I can't be expected to fight to get
her back.

ANALYTIKOS. Sparta will see with the eyes of
chivalry.

MENELAUS. (*Fuming*) But I don't believe in war.

ANALYTIKOS. (*Still obdurate*) Have you forgotten the oath pledged of old, with Ulysses and Agamemnon. They have sworn if ever the time came to fight and defend the queen.

MENELAUS. (*Bitterly*) I didn't think of the triple alliance.

ANALYTIKOS. Can Sparta ask less of her king?

MENELAUS. Let's hear the other side. We can perhaps arbitrate. Peace at any price.

ANALYTIKOS. Some bargains are too cheap.

MENELAUS. (*As a last desperate hope*) But I am a pacifist.

ANALYTIKOS. You are Menelaus of Sparta, and Sparta's a nation of soldiers.

MENELAUS. (*Dejectedly*) I am too proud to fight!

ANALYTIKOS. Here, put on your shield.

(*A great clamour comes up from the courtyard. ANALYTIKOS steps out on the balcony and is greeted with shouts of "The King! The King!" Addressing the crowd*)

People of Sparta, this calamity has been forced upon us.

(MENELAUS *winces*)

We are a peaceful people. But thanks to our unparalleled efficiency, the military system of Sparta is

the most powerful in all Greece and we can mobilize in half an hour.

*(Loud acclaims from the people. MENE-
LAUS, the papyrus still in hand, crawls over
and attempts to stop ANALYTIKOS)*

ANALYTIKOS. *(Not noticing him)* In the midst of connubial and communal peace the thunder-bolt has fallen on the king.

(MENELAUS tugs at ANALYTIKOS' toga)

Broken in spirit as he is, he is already pawing the ground like a battle steed. Never will we lay down our arms! — we and Zeus. *(Cheers)*

Never until the queen is restored to Menelaus. Never, even if it takes ten years.

(MENELAUS squirms. A loud cheer)

Even now the king is buckling on his shield.

(More cheers. ANALYTIKOS steps further forward and then with bursting eloquence)

One hate we have and one alone!

(Yells from below)

Hate by water and hate by land,

Hate of the head and hate of the hand,

Hate of Paris and hate of Troy

That has broken the queen for a moment's toy.

(The yells grow fiercer)

God's thunder will shatter the Trojan throne.

We have one hate and one alone!

(MENELAUS sits on the floor hopelessly mopping his brow with the papyrus. A thunder of voices from the people)

*"We have one hate and one alone. Troy! Troy!
(Helmets and swords are thrown into the air. The cheers grow tumultuous and the curtain falls)*

THE LITTLE SUPPER
A Comedy of La Grande Maitresse

*To Yvette Guilbert,
Who, when she sang "Les Repas à la Mode,"
unconsciously inspired this.*

CHARACTERS

ZAMOR, *a black boy, page to the Countess DU
BARRY.*

DU BARRY, *the king's mistress.*

PIERRE, *a young countryman from Marly.*

LOUIS XV, *king of France.*

THE LITTLE SUPPER

The Scene

Is a little pavilion in the park of the chateau of Lucienne. The decorations are in the style of the period. The walls are panelled with paintings in the manner of Fragonard. A table is set with supper for two. A door right leads to a kitchenette, one left to DU BARRY's bedroom, the entrance back centre is thrown open and the gardens are seen beyond. Outside the twilight is beginning and the room is sweet with the scent of late spring. When the curtains part ZAMOR, is discovered kneeling in front of DU BARRY. She has her pet dog Dorine on her lap, a collar of gold and sapphires is about the beast's neck and ZAMOR is fastening a tiny white wig to the dog's head. The room is lit with a pale glow of pink from the wall candelabras, and all about are hanging canary birds in golden cages.

DU BARRY. Have you done?

ZAMOR. (*Clapping his hands*) Every second he looks more like the king.

DU BARRY. Hurry, Zamor, or His Majesty will come too soon.

ZAMOR. Tell me if you hear him and I'll bid him wait.

(DU BARRY holds the dog at arm's length
and ZAMOR finishes tying the bow)

ZAMOR. So, so. Now he's quite as pompous as the king, and twenty centuries younger.

DU BARRY. Louis' age is youth grown wise.

ZAMOR. For lover, lady, choose less wisdom and more youth.

DU BARRY. Hush, if he should hear you.

ZAMOR. It's no news to the king. Yesterday I offered him my services as lover to yourself by proxy.

DU BARRY. Hush, Zamor, or he'll banish you.

ZAMOR. And would you weep?

DU BARRY. Through Lent without stopping.

ZAMOR. Then I am safe. France is a gentleman. He can't abide a lady's tears. And would you pout?

DU BARRY. For full a fortnight.

ZAMOR. Then am I doubly safe. Your lips were made for kisses not for pouts.

DU BARRY. La, la. A nigger and a poet?

ZAMOR. I cribbed those lines from Mons. Voltaire. I heard him mumbling to himself before he met you at the King's levee.

DU BARRY. Hurry! Dorine's perfect now.

(Laughingly patting the dog's head)

If Louis finds you here he'll raise the devil.

ZAMOR. Give me a gold box filled with figs else I'll spread the scandal.

DU BARRY. What scandal?

ZAMOR. What would they say at Versailles if they heard you spent the night here quite alone with Louis.

DU BARRY. (*Snapping her fingers*) One of your figs for what they'd say.

ZAMOR. Some one might suspect that you're the mistress of the king.

DU BARRY. (*Shocked*) Not that, Zamor. No not that. (*They laugh merrily together*) It's a strange fancy. Why could he have wanted this, I wonder?

ZAMOR. To feel what it would be like to love you without twelve lackeys in the ante-room.

DU BARRY. A king's fancy —

ZAMOR. (*Quickly*) Is a king's command.

DU BARRY. (*Glancing at the table*) Surely I've forgotten something: Iced patties, caramels, l'angoust, and honey for his chocolate.

ZAMOR. For sweetmeats give him kisses and for spiced syrup a peep at your breasts.

DU BARRY. You'll grow up to be a villain, Zamor.

ZAMOR. (*Archly*) How can I, lady, when my school has been this pure court of innocence all undefiled?

DU BARRY. I think you hate me more than Choiseul does.

ZAMOR. Choiseul, the minister, must go. He's in your way and what is worse he bores me.

DU BARRY. Tell that to Louis, Zamor.

ZAMOR. I've told His Majesty already.

DU BARRY. Hurry and begone now.

(She puts Dorine in the King's place at the table)

Once at Versailles at a pinch I managed supper with but six lackeys, and now with my own hands I'm to cook an omelet for France.

ZAMOR. Think of your ancestors and the mixing will come easily.

DU BARRY. Four eggs, some parsley —

ZAMOR. Call up the shade of Grandpa Becu. He was the finest cook in Paris.

DU BARRY. You wrong my lineage, Zamor. Don't you know I'm descended from Jeanne D'Arc of Vaucouleurs?

ZAMOR. I meant on t'other side, but if I'm disloyal to your past I'll be more honest to your future.

DU BARRY. Zamor, some day I think you'll do me harm.

ZAMOR. Who knows? Who knows? Save two eggs and make the omelet thinner for Louis' belly's getting rounder than the world.

DU BARRY. Quick, away, remember the King's command. He's to find me here alone.

ZAMOR. I'm only a little black-boy. He won't see me in the shadows.

DU BARRY. Begone!

ZAMOR. Hide me somewheres that I may hear his private kisses and save you if he grow too fierce.

DU BARRY. (*Patting his head*) My little knight of darkness.

ZAMOR. Come, I'll stay here. (*He goes toward the kitchenette*)

DU BARRY. Not there, for we're to cook together.

ZAMOR. (*Running over to the bedroom door*) Then here? In your bedroom then?

DU BARRY. No, not there — for there —

ZAMOR. Scandal lady! Spot not your purity.

DU BARRY. (*Laughing*) Go, go!

ZAMOR. I think I'll stay. I'll have some news to tell.

DU BARRY. I'll have to have your tongue chopped off to keep you quiet.

ZAMOR. I'll pay you back, my pretty.

DU BARRY. How imp?

ZAMOR. Some day I'll have your head chopped off for thanks.

(*They burst into a peal of merriment and Dorine barks*)

DU BARRY. Quick! Quick!

(ZAMOR runs to the main door centre and then runs back)

ZAMOR. Tell me a secret and I'll go.

DU BARRY. Well what?

ZAMOR. Is the king's night shirt edged with Venice lace?

DU BARRY. *(Pushing him towards the door)* Wait a hundred years and read your history.

ZAMOR. I'll ask Madam de Mirepoix. She ought to know.

(He giggles in DU BARRY's face and she boxes his ears)

DU BARRY. *(Assuming anger)* Imp of iniquity.

ZAMOR. *(Dodging her hand)* I like you best Madam when you're angry. I think you play at fish wife better than at queen.

(And laughing he runs toward the door but again stops and comes back)

ZAMOR. At what time shall we return tomorrow?

DU BARRY. *(Absent-mindedly again examining the table)* Strawberry blamange —

ZAMOR. Not too early if I know the king. *(Dorine barks)* At what time, Mistress?

DU BARRY. His Majesty will hoist a little flag over the pavilion.

(And ZAMOR runs off into the garden.)

DU BARRY *rushes over to a little mirror.*

*She dabs a last touch of rouge to her cheeks)
She hears some one coming up the path.
She sprays the room with a jewelled atomizer. She gives a last twist to her ribbons, and turns suddenly to face PIERRE, who stands bashful and bewildered in the doorway. DU BARRY starts back frightened but the boy's look, half sweetness, half stupidity reassures her)*

DU BARRY. Who are you?

PIERRE. Pierre Domet, I'm a farmer.

DU BARRY. (*Sniffing the air*) Yes, you smell like your trade.

PIERRE. I bathed before I came here and I rolled in the grass to make me sweet.

DU BARRY. There's straw in your hair.

PIERRE. No, that's hay. I've been hiding in the ricks since sunset till every one was gone and I might come and speak to you. (*He yawns*) I'm tired — I should have been in bed an hour gone — I was up at sun-up and with the flocks all day. (*He yawns again*) Begging your pardon, lady. But instead of going straight to bed I've come to see you.

DU BARRY. Do not make your flattery too delicate.

PIERRE. Eh? —

DU BARRY. You see I'm used to kings.

PIERRE. The cows were troublesome. (*He stands stupidly twisting his hat*) There's a new

calf come this mornin'. It's a wee, wee thing. (*He starts laughing like a yokel but a yawn stops him*)

DU BARRY. Do you know who I am?

PIERRE. Sure, lady, I know.

DU BARRY. And you dare come to my pavilion, knowing I'm alone.

PIERRE. I didn't want no one by when I was speakin' to ye.

DU BARRY. What?

PIERRE. I've been waitin' ten years to tell you somethin'.

DU BARRY. Ten years?

PIERRE. Look here, do you know what this is? (*He takes a small prayer book from his pocket*)

DU BARRY. It looks like an almanac.

PIERRE. Ho, ho. A farmer can tell it's rainin' without a book. No, it's a prayer book. (*He comes a step nearer to DU BARRY*) Take it, lady.

DU BARRY. But I don't want it.

PIERRE. (*Urgently*) Take it. It belongs to you.

DU BARRY. (*Amazed*) To me?

PIERRE. Have a look at it. But maybe you've forgotten it. (*He puts the book on the table and shrinks back towards the door*)

DU BARRY. No. You're mistaken. Many thanks and now good evening.

PIERRE. Look closer, closer — and maybe you'll remember. I've kept it for you ten years, my lady.

DU BARRY. (*Gingerly taking it up*) It's warm!

PIERRE. (*Naïvely*) It's been in my shirt.

DU BARRY. (*Letting it slip to the table*) Indeed!

PIERRE. Next to my heart, lady. At noon in the fields and at night in bed when I prayed to the angels and dreamed of you. (*He attempts to stifle another yawn and leans wearily against one of the painted panels*)

DU BARRY. My poor boy. You're tired. You're pale. Perhaps you haven't eaten anything all day, and now your thoughts stray.

PIERRE. I had three jugs of milk and half a loaf for mid-day and my thoughts are all in order. (*He goes over to the table takes the book and hands it to her*)

DU BARRY. It isn't mine. I'll have some one find out who lost it and you shall have a louis for your trouble. So now —

PIERRE. Open at the first page, lady. (*Instinctively DU BARRY does so*) What name is written there?

DU BARRY. (*Reading*) Jeanne — the rest is faded.

PIERRE. Jeanne! Jeanne! (*DU BARRY watches him fascinated*) You dropped it in the court-yard ten years gone.

DU BARRY. Court-yard? —

PIERRE. Yes, the convent de Sainte Aure.

DU BARRY. Sainte Aure?

PIERRE. Don't you remember? — Rue Neuve Sainte Genevieve!

DU BARRY. Holy Virgin! Yes! Yes! And I was beaten for losing it and they took away my rosary. And you —

PIERRE. I was the boy who brought the vegetables. Don't you remember me?

DU BARRY. I've forgotten too much to remember so little.

PIERRE. I saw you one day peeking through the rails of the court-yard. You were watching the great ladies roll by in their coaches. And your face was white and pink like wild roses. And once you looked at me and —

DU BARRY. Yes —

PIERRE. Another time you spoke to me and one of the holy sisters bade you come away. She cackled like a hen and called you Jeanne.

DU BARRY. Yes, that was Sister Rosalie.

PIERRE. And then I knew your name was Jeanne.

DU BARRY. That much of me is still unchanged.

PIERRE. Look at the book then. (DU BARRY *has taken it up and again looks at the first page*)

DU BARRY. (*Reading*) Jeanne —

PIERRE. Look closer.

DU BARRY. (*Holding the book nearer one of*

the candelabras) Yes, now it's clear: Jeanne, Jeanne Becu.

PIERRE. I came every morning on the wagon from Marly. And all the while to the jog of the wheels I kept saying, "Jeanne, Jeanne," because I knew I'd see you again walking in the court-yard.

DU BARRY. And the book? —

PIERRE. One day you dropped it and I picked it up and stuck it here in my shirt next to my heart because I thought you might have kissed it. (*His frankness begins to frighten him*) And now I guess I'd better go.

DU BARRY. And after all these years you come to make confession?

PIERRE. (*Not heeding her*) The next week I came to bring you back your psalms but you had gone, and I never set eyes on you again until you rolled up to the Chateau in the carriage of the king.

DU BARRY. Yes, I learned much at Saint Aure and after —

PIERRE. (*Interrupting her, he speaks in a sort of rapture*) And you hadn't changed a bit, Jeanne. Just the same look of strawberries and white cream in your face.

DU BARRY. What were you doing at Lucienne, Pierre — I suppose I'm to call you Pierre since I've known you so long?

PIERRE. I'll let you if you wan't to. I'm helper to the seventh gardener.

DU BARRY. The seventh? — That reassures me, and what do you expect of me now?

PIERRE. (*By this time so weary that he is leaning against one of the chairs near the door*) I don't know, just to touch your hand and then die for it if you wish it.

DU BARRY. To touch my hand. — Look at me. Come closer.

PIERRE. Jeanne — begging your pardon, lady — it hurts to look straight at the sun.

DU BARRY. Blink then, and come a little closer.

PIERRE. Lady, don't jest.

DU BARRY. My jests are kept for kings.

PIERRE. Don't tread on me as if I were an ant.

DU BARRY. My foot's too small. Come closer. (*He shrinks away, she is charmed at his shyness*) Come here, let me take the straw from your hair. How new your suit is.

PIERRE. It cost the savings of seven seasons' pumpkins. (*His weariness again gets the better of him and he barely succeeds in stifling another yawn*)

DU BARRY. It's worth it. (*The twilight has deepened, she lifts one of the candelabras from the table and holds it close to his face to see him better*) I think I rather like you. (*She begins laughing softly*)

PIERRE. (*Drawing back frightened, drops his hat*) Holy Virgin! Why did I come?

DU BARRY. Your brow is high. There's room

there for nobility. (*She smiles*) And firm lips too. (*The idea begins to amuse her. She puts down the candelabra and laughs louder*) I've been too long in town; I'll have a taste of pastoral passion. (*PIERRE reaches for his hat, she catches him by the arm and says very suddenly*) I think I'll kiss you. (*PIERRE crouches down in terror*) Get up! Get up! Why make me stoop to do it?

PIERRE. Don't hurt me. I never could abide folks stickin' pins in beetles.

DU BARRY. (*Very close to him and speaking half teasingly, half tenderly*) One little moment in the whirl of worlds. (*She bends over him*) And then you must be gone for ever.

PIERRE. (*Suddenly losing his fear and springing up*) Mother of God! Mother of God! My lips will be warm in the earth from your kisses.

DU BARRY. No. That's too fierce. (*She looks at him. His tired awkwardness touches her. Her laugh takes on a note of deeper tenderness*) Come then, but remember I'm not a milk-maid. Don't crush me, Pierre.

(*Half in terror, half in ecstasy, he is moving towards her. The laugh's still lurking in her eyes. But at this moment Dorine barks*)

DU BARRY. (*Starting back*) Christ! I'd forgotten! Quick, fly, or you're dead!

PIERRE. (*Dazed*) The kiss — the kiss!

DU BARRY. (*In an agony of fear*) He's here!
(*She rushes to the door, but LOUIS is coming up the path*) Quick! Quick! (*She looks to the kitchenette, then to the bedroom*) Not there! Not there! (*Suddenly an idea comes to her and she pushes PIERRE under the table set for supper*) Slip out when I make the chance.

(*She sees his country hat on the floor. There is no time to hide it. She hurriedly arranges the folds of the cloth so that they hide him and is just getting up when the king enters*)

LOUIS. Countess, I thank you for the curtesy.

DU BARRY. I'm practising the minuet.

LOUIS. Are we to dance then?

DU BARRY. Yes, after supper.

LOUIS. And for orchestra? —

DU BARRY. The ten canaries you so sweetly sent me.

LOUIS. (*Handing DU BARRY a little packet*) See what I've brought for Dorine.

DU BARRY. (*Opening the packet*) Look, Dorine, see what Louis's brought you. Grilled rabbit.

LOUIS. And for you —

DU BARRY. Only your presence.

LOUIS. No, something more. (*He hands her a paper*) Choiseul's dismissal.

DU BARRY. Poor Choiseul! How he'll miss me.

LOUIS. Don't let your grief for Choiseul smudge our supper.

DU BARRY. France, dear France, see I've forgotten nothing. Supper's ready. Imagine being cosy with a king!

LOUIS. Come always to the meetings of the senate.

DU BARRY. Have you come here to talk of court?

LOUIS. The cares of France are only tolerable when you are sitting on my knee.

DU BARRY. (*Slipping into his lap*) My big, big boy, why do you bother about the Dutch ambassador when you know my garter needs unfastening?

LOUIS. Now?

DU BARRY. Yes, if you will. (*She attempts to lead him towards the boudoir*)

LOUIS. No. Let's first sup.

DU BARRY. We'll make the omelette then. (*She tries to get him to the kitchenette*)

LOUIS. No, I've a whim to play my fancy to the full. Remember that we're farmers for the evening. So you'll do all the housework and I'll watch.

DU BARRY. (*Vainly trying to lead him from the room*) Come, you can break the eggs. And stuff

your ruffles in your sleeve lest the lace should spoil my mixing. Come!

LOUIS. No, I'll stay here. It suits my humour that you wait on me.

DU BARRY. It suits me that you help.

LOUIS. No! No! Remember you're my wife this evening and must obey.

DU BARRY. (*Scandalized*) Your wife! Not that!

LOUIS. What shall I call you?

DU BARRY. Chloe — Betty — What you will. Come, help me do the housework, farmer.

LOUIS. No, I'm tired. What's that? (*He sees PIERRE's hat lying on the floor*)

DU BARRY. (*Starting back*) Your farmer's hat, stupid. Zamor brought it for a final touch. (*She slips the straw hat on the king's head*) La! La! — It becomes you better than your crown.

LOUIS. Quick, hustle, for my stomach's calling.

DU BARRY. Come with me.

LOUIS. No. I'll stay here. Go fetch my pipe.

DU BARRY. I'll not have you smoking in the parlour. La, man, you're lazier than the lazy king of France. Come help me, idler.

LOUIS. (*Assuming tremendous anger*) No! No! I said no.

DU BARRY. The kitchen's bright and cheery —

LOUIS. Hustle, hus-wife.

DU BARRY. (*Glancing at the table*) I've lost my mood for mixing eggs.

LOUIS. What's that?

DU BARRY. Let me stay with you, Louis.

LOUIS. That's not my name. I'm — let me see — shall we say Pierre?

DU BARRY. (*Quickly*) Speak lower!

LOUIS. Why, what's the matter?

DU BARRY. Yes, Pierre — that's a splendid country name. (*Again glancing nervously at the table*) I'm no longer hungry, let's to bed.

LOUIS. Too soon, too soon. I haven't eaten yet.

DU BARRY. I'm weary tending house — the chickens and the children.

LOUIS. Don't make me father of too many. I've quite enough at court.

DU BARRY. (*In mock surprise*) At court?

LOUIS. I'm wandering. Go fetch the omelette.

DU BARRY. I'll mix it here at table. (*She goes nervously into the kitchen. When she returns with a yellow bowl and the eggs she finds LOUIS munching a peppermint*) You lout, stop nibbling until supper's ready.

LOUIS. Don't be too hard on me for I've been slaving for you all the day. It's honest sweat —

DU BARRY. Not that! not that!

LOUIS. Well, then we'll make it perspiration.

DU BARRY. No, — either is revolting. The next thing you'll be saying is manure.

LOUIS. Why not?

Manure is food for fairest flowers,
And from the mud lift rosy bowers.

DU BARRY. That's Shakespeare.

LOUIS. No! Quite impromptu, I assure you.

DU BARRY. Well, no more please. Remember that we're farmers and there isn't any poetry in the country.

LOUIS. Rousseau thinks otherwise. We'll have him come for breakfast, shall we say next Monday?

DU BARRY. Lord! I've forgot the parsley. Run in and fetch it, it's next the sink.

LOUIS. (*He starts up and then sits down*) I'll not move another step. Bestir yourself, my Betty. (*He leans across the table and chucks her under the chin*) You're getting stouter, wench.

DU BARRY. (*Nervously, for the cloth hanging from the table moves*) Fragonard has sent one of the panels. (*She points to the bedroom*) Run in and see it ere the daylight dies.

(*She has broken the eggs and is clumsily mixing them in the bowl in her lap. Slowly at the side of the table at which the king is sitting a foot appears from under the lace cover. He is about to spring up but glances at DU BARRY who sits innocently stirring the eggs*)

LOUIS. (*Speaking very slowly*) I'll see the panels later by your light, my light of love.

DU BARRY. (*Leaning lovingly across the table*)
If you were king of France and I your mistress I
couldn't love you more.

LOUIS. (*Sternly*) Countess! (*He flings the
hat from his head*)

DU BARRY. Am I no longer Chloe?

LOUIS. My mood has changed. Now you shall
be Zulelia chief houri of my harem.

DU BARRY. France is fantastical tonight.

LOUIS. My fancy is to tell a tale.

DU BARRY. My Lord the omelet can wait.

LOUIS. (*Suddenly*) Zulelia, are you honest?

DU BARRY. Am I to play Zulelia?

LOUIS. Yes, for you're something of an actress.

DU BARRY. Look not so cloudy, sire, I hope the
story's happy.

LOUIS. Happy as truth enamoured of a lie.

DU BARRY. You speak like Macbeth, Prince of
Denmark. Tragedy's your métier. We'll have to
have theatricals at Versaille. Build me a theatre,
France.

LOUIS. Come, let's rehearse.

DU BARRY. My part's not written.

LOUIS. You play it well impromptu.

DU BARRY. I hope it's comedy.

LOUIS. Or tragedy. 'Tis but a hair's breadth
that divides the twain.

DU BARRY. Yes, but gayer, gayer, Louis. Shall
I light more candles? (*She begins to laugh*)

LOUIS. There's something broken in your laugh tonight.

DU BARRY. I — I —

LOUIS. See, you've lost your knack already. Learn better. Set your scene more patly for the next performance. (*Dorine barks*)

DU BARRY. (*Nervously*) Ah, so you've finished all the rabbit? The dog's done and now lets finish supper.

LOUIS. No, you haven't yet heard my story.

DU BARRY. If it's short have done with it. I can't abide long tales. Is it by La Fontaine?

LOUIS. No, by me; by me.

DU BARRY. You?

LOUIS. Yes, made in my head and tempered by my heart.

DU BARRY. Begin! Begin! (*She leans back in her chair munching a caramel*)

LOUIS. Once there was an emperor of Rome at Capri.

DU BARRY. Is that across the boarder?

LOUIS. (*Glancing at PIERRE's leg which is now stretched full length from beneath the table*) Look further south, further south, my lady.— A king of Rome at Capri, and his favourite slave dropped poison in his wine.

DU BARRY. It starts in gloomily.

LOUIS. And when the emperor heard of this for punishment the slave was swilled with drink and

lead to the moment of desire, and then cast head-long from the straight cliffs straight into the sea.

DU BARRY. Splash! So sinks a faithless slave.

LOUIS. Into a sea of sapphire. For the water's blue round Capri.

DU BARRY. Is that all?

LOUIS. Blue as your eyes, Jeanne. *(She leans towards him and as she does so she sees the foot peeping out from under the cover)*

DU BARRY. *(Suddenly bursting into laughter)* I've had enough of gloom. Let's go out into the fields and for the sound of every cricket I'll give you twenty kisses.

LOUIS. Night's fallen and I'm chilly, Betty.

(She slips into his lap trying to hide the foot by spreading out her skirt. Her fan drops to the floor.)

DU BARRY. *(Sweetly)* Why do you tell such gloomy tales?

LOUIS. So that you may be merrier when they're done.

DU BARRY. Come, my king, we'll see the Fragonards by candlelight. *(She strokes his hair and attempts to lead him towards the little bedroom. Suddenly he stops)*

LOUIS. You've dropped your fan, Jeanne.

DU BARRY. *(Standing in front of him so that he cannot see the table and putting her arm around him)*

and slowly drawing him nearer the bedroom)
FRAGONARD has made you look quite young, my Lord.

LOUIS. Then the panel will not suit me. I'm too old to play the young fool, Countess. *(He steps away from her, she shrinks back, then comes closer to him)*

DU BARRY. Come kiss me, Louis. The spring air isn't good for my morality. *(Then very languishing)* I'm weak tonight.

LOUIS. I've never seen you stronger.

DU BARRY. I'm trembling like a virgin waiting for temptation.

LOUIS. What's that?

DU BARRY. I'm warm with love.

LOUIS. Then most surely you will need your fan. *(He breaks away from her. She shrinks back frightened. The boy's leg is now stretched out full length between them)*

LOUIS. Are you honest, pride of my harem?

DU BARRY. By the blood of my ancestor, Jeanne of Vaucouleur, I'm innocent!

LOUIS. That lineage is none too well established.

DU BARRY. By my love for you, by the agony of Mary. I've never wronged you, Louis.

LOUIS. I've not accused you, Jeanne. The room's too crowded. Three were too many to play at farner. *(He steps towards the door)*

DU BARRY. (*Pleading*) But you must hear me!

LOUIS. Tomorrow I shall be less deaf.

DU BARRY. He's but a poor lout from the fields.

LOUIS. A country cousin, maybe?

DU BARRY. A gardener from Lucienne.

LOUIS. 'Tis nearer home, then.

DU BARRY. The boy has known me ten years. When I was little at the convent he used to bring me vegetables.

LOUIS. (*Sniffing the air*) He smells of his trade. The memory has an odour.

DU BARRY. A boy's love, Louis.

LOUIS. Is a long love, Jeanne?

DU BARRY. He came to bring me back my little prayer book.

LOUIS. And do you think you'll need it?

DU BARRY. See! See! (*She gets the book*) My name is on the page here, almost faded, for 'tis ten years back.

LOUIS. The name is fading but the love survives. (*He steps nearer the door*)

DU BARRY. But I am innocent. (*She throws herself on her knees before him*)

LOUIS. Get up. Get up. There's a draught here from the garden.

DU BARRY. No! No! But you must hear me. By my love for you, I'm innocent.

LOUIS. Then for tonight I'll leave you to your

innocence. Come to me tomorrow and I may believe you better. I think I'm getting old, Jeanne. (*He is half way across the threshold and half in the shadow of the garden. He steps back into the room*) The stars are out, it's cold and I've forgot my hat. (*He steps nearer to reach it, but stops*) No, I'll leave it. I've worn his. Put it on his head, Jeanne, and let him play the king.

DU BARRY. But you must believe me —

LOUIS. Perhaps I will tomorrow. Nero at Capri didn't love his slave. (*He is at the door*) Good night, Betty.

DU BARRY. (*Intensely*) No! No!

LOUIS. (*Lightly*) Or is it Chloe then? Good night.

DU BARRY. Why have you done this, Louis?

LOUIS. Am I not the king of France?

(*And he goes. For a moment she stands gazing after him. Then she rushes over to the table and pulls back the cloth. PIERRE has fallen asleep. She leans over him, she shakes him*)

DU BARRY. Pierre! Pierre! (*He doesn't move. She gets up and looking at him speaks very slowly*) And this poor clown has slept while France has spoken.

AND THE CURTAIN FALLS

SISTERS OF SUSANNAH
A Biblical Farce

To Helen,
The inimitable, if not the only Myrah.

CHARACTERS

SAMSON, *Zillah's husband.*

JOB, *an old man of Baborah.*

MYRAH, *an elderly unlovely lady of Baborah.*

A TRAVELLER, *from the West.*

A SCHOLAR, *from the East.*

CHEW, *a young man, Samson's secretary.*

SISTERS OF SUSANNAH

The Scene

Is the beautiful garden of MYRAH. Far to the South gleam the minarets of a biblical city. MYRAH'S pavilion is in the suburbs. Towards its back the ground dips to a lower terrace. Left is the entrance to the pavilion, and to the right an ancient door to the garden is set in a wall of turquoise tiles which shuts the garden in from the intrusive high road. A turn in the road is visible to the right. Here stands a camphor tree bending its twisting branches over the wall into the garden. The trees and bushes are rich with the luxuriousness of the South. In the shade a fountain splashes. On a peg of emerald sits a parrot of blue and gold.

Time — Shortly after the trial of SUSANNAH as recorded in the Books of the Apocrypha.

In the renaissance of interest in biblical literature the story of SUSANNAH seems to have been scathingly neglected. Therefore the following needs no apology.

Note:—As recorded in the doubtful Books of the Bible, Susannah as she sat bathing in her garden became the object of the admiration of two old men, who being repulsed, assailed her virtue; and the matter coming into the courts of law, a famous trial ensued.

When the curtain lifts JOB is discovered peeping through the wall of MYRAH'S garden as SAMSON enters.

SAMSON. Father! You are early up!

JOB. (*Embarrassed*) I am about to leave the city.

SAMSON. May the Lord spill sunshine on your way. (*He glances towards the wall of the garden*)

JOB. You, too, my son, are soon astir.

SAMSON. So that the full day may be rich in goodly deeds. Lengthy are the hours of a reformer.

JOB. You, my son, of all men, are most fitting to rid the city of this scourge of Susannahs. When I return from my journey, may the deed be done.

SAMSON. The task is difficult.

JOB. (*Blessing him*) May the heavenly hosts aid you and the bright seraphim assist you. Because a strumpet like this Susannah sits in her garden sunning her back and because the lechery of age gazes on her, and the matter gets into the courts, the women of Baborah, the erstwhile immaculate women of Baborah, have all seen fit to do likewise. Things are not as they used to be.

SAMSON. They never were.

JOB. And this Susannah instead of being driven from the city like a heathen, and a harlot has become the hour's wonder.

SAMSON. Her pavilions are crowded even on the Sabbath.

JOB. Four rabbis were counted among the crush last Saturday.

SAMSON. I —

JOB. Yes. Some say five. The eighth plague has come out of Egypt.

SAMSON. I have sent Chew, my secretary, ahead to the Inn of the Caravans to announce my coming. Will you honour me by eating with me, and while we sup you may discourse the law.

JOB. Holy in the sight of the Lord is a man hungry for knowledge.

SAMSON. And when you are on your way I shall return to my labours.

JOB. (*Reverently*) Good deeds taketh a man early from the bed of his wife. (*And then with unction*) I suppose as yet there are no women in the gardens here on the Road of the Strangers.

SAMSON. They begin quite early.

JOB. (*Hopefully*) But surely it is too near the innocence of dawn for these shameless creatures to show themselves.

SAMSON. I —

JOB. The degeneracy of luxury has descended on the city. In my days the sentries went to their posts with only two mattresses but now —

SAMSON. I —

JOB. (*Not to be interrupted*) Yes, you are

right. This is not the time for investigating *that*. At present there is more immediate need for the work of our reform society. The news of what is happening in Baborah has spread all over Asia. The caravans were never so crowded with tourists. Travellers come from dim Damascus and up from Egypt. And this morning three Buddhist priests arrived from China, and one of them was blind.

SAMSON. (*Indignantly*) We will forbid strangers the city,— that will perhaps, stem this pestilence. (*And then as though erasing the thought for ever*) As for myself, of course, these bare backs mean nothing.

JOB. (*With lifted hand and bended head*) That I can well believe, my son.

SAMSON. I have but to think of women like my modest Zillah, and all she symbolizes to know that I shall carry my work ruthlessly to the end,— the bitter end.

JOB. You are a model of righteousness.

SAMSON. Father —

JOB. You and Zillah, your wife, are the pride of Baborah. You two — twin flames of purity in the night of lewdness that has descended upon us.

SAMSON. Poor little unknowing Zillah. I can see her now singing as she bends over her water colours.

JOB. In her bright name then, remember the mission of purification that has been entrusted to

you. Clean up the city. Drive the females of Baborah back to their dresses.

(And then in a tone of enthusiastic prophecy)

The Lord will give you strength. Scourge them into their shirts. Think of the pitfalls to youth ever curious and age ever hopeful.

(MYRAH comes out of the pavilion strumming upon her dulcimer. She begins singing, with less pitch than passion)

MYRAH. My lips are as ripe pomegranates to the lips of my beloved. My —

(She is about to go on, but the thundering voice of JOB sounds up from beyond the walls)

MYRAH. Men! Men! *(She rushes over and peeps through a hole in the door)*

JOB. Remember, my son. None of us is safe from this temptation.

(At this moment CHEW runs in)

CHEW. Master, the wheat cakes have been done three minutes and the coffee wine smells sweeter than the fragrant valley of Cashmere.

JOB. *(To SAMSON, tasting the wheat cakes from afar)* As you say, you can examine these gardens after breakfast.

(And they go down the Road of the Strangers to the inn. MYRAH, modestly lowering her face veil steps out into the road)

to look after them as ZILLAH enters from the pavilion and seeing herself alone, goes over to speak to the parrot)

ZILLAH. Parrot, say what you said yesterday. Say: "Lady, your back is as fair as Susanah's. Say it and I'll give you an eye of corn dipped in thyme. (*But the bird is silent*) You are as dumb as a dromedary. You horrid unchivalrous beast, you. You're as unseeing as Samson, my stupid husband.

MYRAH. (*Coming back into the garden*) You chatter too much.

ZILLAH. (*Petulantly*) The bird won't speak.

MYRAH. Pretty dear, cheep, cheep! He never says a word until after luncheon.

ZILLAH. He's been eating his lunch ever since yesterday. Make him say my back is as fair as Susanah's.

MYRAH. I'll do nothing of the kind.

ZILLAH. Why not?

MYRAH. (*Acidly*) Because I believe even dumb beasts should speak the truth.

ZILLAH. Don't be horrid, Myrah.

(*MYRAH begins strumming on her dulcimer and singing*)

MYRAH. My kisses are sweet as almond flowers to the lips of my beloved.

ZILLAH. Don't you think you're too old to be singing songs like that?

MYRAH. No woman is ever too old for love if she has an imagination. (*She goes on singing*)

MYRAH. My bosom's as soft as a peach to the cheeks of my beloved.

(*At this the parrot suddenly emits a negating shriek*)

ZILLAH. Why even polly knows you're lying.

MYRAH. (*Barely controlling herself*) I wonder which is the harder. The bowl of this beautiful instrument (*Pointing to the dulcimer*) or your empty head.

ZILLAH. (*Frightened*) I wish I'd never come here. I've been sitting for two days down there under the mulberries (*She points to the terrace in back*) and not a single man has stopped to peek at me.

MYRAH. You poor fool. Don't you know that Susanah sat in the garden for nearly three months before anything happened?

ZILLAH. But something did happen and those two nasty old men came along and then there was that perfectly delicious scandal and now she's more popular in Baborah than the king's baboon.

MYRAH. Yes, and how did you ever get the idea of doing what she did?

ZILLAH. (*Tearfully*) Isn't every woman in Baborah doing it and besides the idea came to me when I heard what my husband, and all those other reformers intended to do. (*She weeps*)

MYRAH. Dry your fountains. No wonder he

can't abide you. Don't you know a damp woman makes a dull wife?

ZILLAH. If some one would only come along and I could get talked about.

MYRAH. What good would that do? They could talk till the Messiah's come and gone and you'd still be virtuous.

ZILLAH. I want to teach Samson a lesson. I think his love for me might return if he saw other men admiring me.

(She weeps)

MYRAH. *(Again begins to sing)* My eyes are as twin stars to the eyes of my beloved.

ZILLAH. You're always singing about your lovers because you never had any.

MYRAH. *(And her eyes snap)* What's that?

ZILLAH. No! Not even a husband of your own. Nor anybody else's.

MYRAH. I wish to God I hadn't let you come even though you did promise me your white peacock if I'd let you sit in my garden.

ZILLAH. I feel so badly, Myrah, you mustn't mind what I say.

MYRAH. I mind? Why didn't you sit in your own garden?

ZILLAH. Why, how preposterous. Right in the middle of the city. You don't think I wanted my husband to know what I was doing until something happened, do you? He mightn't like it. You

know how enormously ethical he is! He and those other silly reformers.

MYRAH. A stranger might think Baborah's really interesting. Everybody is so anxious to reform it.

ZILLAH. If Samson only thought less of morality and more of me.

MYRAH. Hurry up and bare your back and go down and sit there where they can see you through the chink in the wall. Some men went by a moment ago.

ZILLAH. (*Enthusiastically*) Do you think others will be passing?

MYRAH. If your husband finds out what you're doing — why, perhaps he'll beat you.

ZILLAH. I've thought of all the terrible things that might happen whilst I lay alone, all, all alone in my bed at night. And now I know that love is holier than discretion.

MYRAH. (*Looking towards the road*) Listen!

ZILLAH. I'm so nervous!

MYRAH. Quick! Bare your back.

(*She goes over to the wall and climbing on a copper water cistern, peeps over*)

Two strangers are coming from the city, Hurry!

(*ZILLAH modestly dropping her face veil and all of a tremble as to possibilities goes down to the lower terrace unfastening her tunic*)

MYRAH. (*Still at the wall*) If she can only get them into the garden, the dears!

(*She gets down and comes over to the parrot's peg*)

God grant something happens, polly. It's the only way to get rid of her.

(*And she goes into the pavilion as the TRAVELLER from the West and the SCHOLAR from the East appear on the Road of the Strangers*)

SCHOLAR. Let us rest a while under this tree.

TRAVELLER. I haven't had anything to eat.

SCHOLAR. (*Dreamily*) You of the West seem ever scenting the future, we of the East are ever remembering the past.

TRAVELLER. (*Brusquely*) It's a long time since breakfast.

SCHOLAR. But around the rim of the world they meet.

TRAVELLER. Have you seen all the sights of Baborah?

SCHOLAR. I've seen the king's baboon with his crown of emeralds but I find the gardens more enchanting.

(*They exchange significant glances*)

TRAVELLER. (*Patly*) You're right, sir.

SCHOLAR. (*Glancing at the Wall*) This one looks very charming.

TRAVELLER. (*Jumping up*) I'll see, sir.

SCHOLAR. We are taught in the East that the mind can travel through all space.

TRAVELLER. I'm from the West. I've got to see things to believe them.

SCHOLAR. (*Continuing*) And that the hunger of the flesh is but a moment's vanity.

TRAVELLER. I'll never make them believe at home that the women here sit bathing right out in their back yards.

(*He goes toward the wall*)

SCHOLAR. We of the East move slowly. Our haste is languorous.

TRAVELLER. I hope that the chink will be larger than in the last place.

(*Bells ring from a distant minaret*)

SCHOLAR. The hour sounds and I have forgotten to pray.

TRAVELLER. You've been too busy looking at the gardens.

(*The SCHOLAR facing the East falls on his knees in prayer*)

SCHOLAR. (*Swaying up and down*) Allah! Allah! Make me worthy of the sight of mine eyes. Allah! Allah!

(*As he sways back he sees the TRAVELLER looking for a chink in the wall*)

SCHOLAR. The courtesy of the East is different, Stranger.

TRAVELER. (*Busy at the wall*) Yes?

SCHOLAR. In the East we would never think of doing what you are doing until you had finished your devotions. Blessed be Allah, Allah all merciful.

TRAVELLER. (*Suddenly*) Ah! (*He has found a crack in the wall*)

SCHOLAR. (*Jumping up from his knees*) Allah will forgive me if I don't pray the full twenty minutes. There's nothing I shouldn't see so as to be able to tell my pupils. Is the garden beautiful, brother?

TRAVELLER. (*With gusto*) It's the finest yet.

SCHOLAR. (*Attempting to peer through the chink*) It's a promising pavilion. (*He jostles the TRAVELLER*)

TRAVELLER. Is that a touch of your Eastern languor?

SCHOLAR. I beseech your pardon, brother. Sometimes my hunger for instruction gets the better of me.

(*MYRAH comes out of the pavilion still playing on her dulcimer*)

MYRAH. (*Singing*) Ripe cherries are my lips to the lips of my beloved.

TRAVELLER. Ah! Music while we examine the scenery. This is a delightful country. (*MYRAH looks into the lower part of garden*)

MYRAH. Poor Zillah. I'm afraid she'll be horribly burnt. And all these ravenous mosquitoes.

TRAVELLER. (*His eye glued to the chink*)
Don't you think this is the finest garden we've seen?

SCHOLAR. (*Crowding him*) I've had but little chance to judge. Would you mind letting me look through? You know how interested I am in botany.

MYRAH. (*Addressing the Parrot*) I hope God would slay me, parrot, before I'd be such a fool as Zillah. She can sit there till the day after the last judgment and no one will ever notice her.

SCHOLAR. (*Suddenly*) Have you ever seen such a eucalyptus?

TRAVELLER. (*Mystified*) What sir?

MYRAH. (*Startled*) Surely those are voices. Could the strangers really have stopped?

(*She goes over to the water pot, climbs up and peeps over*)

MYRAH. By the soul of Saul I can't miss a chance like this. (*She calls to them*) Sst! Sst!

(*The SCHOLAR and the TRAVELLER start back. She modestly lowers her face veil and opens the door of the garden*)

MYRAH. Will not the strangers enter?

(*They hesitate*)

MYRAH. (*Sweetly*) Welcome to Baborah. Enter Strangers.

TRAVELLER. It looks nice and shady.

SCHOLAR. There isn't anything I oughtn't see so as to be able to tell my pupils.

(*They enter the garden and as MYRAH*

closes the door they go to the back part of the garden to look at ZILLAH through the bushes)

MYRAH. This will never do.

(She takes up her dulcimer and begins singing)

MYRAH. My white arms are like bending swans to the eyes of my beloved.

(But this touch of intimate autobiography makes no impression on the strangers)

MYRAH. This will never do.

(She plucks them by the sleeve)

MYRAH. Gentlemen.

(They turn around)

TRAVELLER. Who's the lady there by the fountain?

MYRAH. My slave girl washing my veils.
(And at this the parrot cackles)

SCHOLAR. *(Starting forward)* I must examine the textiles.

(The TRAVELLER follows him as MYRAH intercepts them)

MYRAH. *(Pointing towards the pavilion and with melting sweetness)* Within are sweet syrups of Asia.

SCHOLAR. *(Pushing the TRAVELLER towards the door)* Taste first Traveller from the West.

TRAVELLER. Nay, after you.

SCHOLAR. That is not the courtesy of the East.

MYRAH. (*Addressing the SCHOLAR*) The women of Baborah lift not their veils except in the shade of the courtyard. Will you not enter?

SCHOLAR. No. I have to pray. (*He falls on his knees*) Allah! Oh Allah! Give me strength in the time of my need.

(*MYRAH stands impatiently watching him, beating her foot on the gravel of the garden*)

SCHOLAR. Sometimes I pray all day, woman of Baborah.

(*On his knees he goes in the direction of the back terrace*)

MYRAH. (*To the TRAVELLER*) My neck is as a column of snow in the moonlight.

TRAVELLER. I'll take your word for it.

(*The parrot emits another terrific shriek. She goes over to appease it*)

MYRAH. (*To the bird*) Later you shall have a pomegranate seed. Now close your eyes.

SCHOLAR. (*Swiftly to the TRAVELLER*) If we go in together nothing can happen to either of us.

TRAVELLER. I guess she's the mother of the lady in the yard.

SCHOLAR. Yes, we'll have her call her in.

MYRAH. (*Addressing the TRAVELLER*) Pestilential is the sun of the south. Enter the cool of my courtyard.

(*He looks towards the SCHOLAR*)

MYRAH. (*To the SCHOLAR*) From my courtyard is a far view across the valley. It is called the "Valley of Desire." (*And then again very delicately*) Within are sweet syrups of Asia.

SCHOLAR. (*Very meaningly*) Let us seek shelter from this heat.

(*And they both go towards the pavilion greatly to the consternation of MYRAH who follows them in as ZILLAH comes up from the lower terrace*)

ZILLAH. Surely I heard voices in the garden.

(*She looks about and the parrot nods significantly in the direction of the pavilion.*)

ZILLAH. Ah! So! There, Polly? (*And then she tiptoes to the house. She listens for a moment and then the light breaks*)

Antique Viper!!

(*She raps on the door and a moment later*

MYRAH *lowering her face veil comes out into the garden*)

ZILLAH. Who's within?

MYRAH. Go back under the mulberries.

(*She starts back into the house but ZILLAH stops her*)

ZILLAH. Who's within?

MYRAH. The house is empty.

ZILLAH. Listen!

(*The voice of the SCHOLAR can be heard at prayer*)

MYRAH. That's the wind through the sycamore.

ZILLAH. So!

MYRAH. Go down into the garden.

ZILLAH. (*Her wrath rising*) You hectic old hyena! Do you think I'll sit down there like a fat dove playing your decoy so that you can pounce on any masculine morsels like a dusty vulture.

(MYRAH *rushing towards the gate of the garden*)

Go!

ZILLAH. Where are the travellers that came up the Road of the Strangers?

MYRAH. One glimpse at you and they fled. Out of my garden!

ZILLAH. (*Almost crying*) Remember, I gave you my white peacock.

MYRAH. (*Towering in her rage*) May you both toast in Tophet. Be gone I tell you.

(*She flings the door open but starts back suddenly and as suddenly shuts it for at this moment SAMSON and CHEW appear on the Road of the Strangers*)

MYRAH. Quick! They're coming back. I told you no one was within.

ZILLAH. Myrah, can you ever forgive me for doubting you?

MYRAH. Yes, I forgive you.

ZILLAH. (*Weeping*) Myrah!

MYRAH. (*Bustling back to the house*) A love-

less wife is as a fool that gabbles. Quick, under the mulberries.

(And ZILLAH lowering her face veil descends to the lower garden and MYRAH to her deeds within the pavilion as SAMSON and CHEW stop under the camphor tree)

SAMSON. You say that even here on the Road of the Strangers the women indulge in this extraordinary custom?

CHEW. I investigated these suburbs yesterday.

SAMSON. Is that why you came so late with your report to the committee?

CHEW. You couldn't expect me just to peep through and run away, could you?

SAMSON. Remember, we are working for the moral uplift of Baborah. You mustn't swerve from your duty.

CHEW. That isn't likely with you as my master. I never saw anybody as dutiful as you were yesterday investigating that yellow pavilion near the Lake of the Flamingoes.

SAMSON. Never have I seen such shoulders.

(And then controlling himself)

This scourge will demoralize our fair city. If the history of this horror should ever reach the ears of my wife she'd rush from Baborah as she would flee the pestilence.

(And then after a moment of deep thought)

You might tell her, Chew. Ah, but let's to work. Many a private misery is buried under a public deed. A curse has fallen on Baborah.

CHEW. That all depends on the way you look at things.

SAMSON. It's gone as far as possible.

CHEW. Not yet. True to the old traditions the ladies still keep their faces veiled.

SAMSON. Ah, well, let's begin. Variety is the spice of reform.

(CHEW begins examining the wall while
SAMSON sits under the tree)

CHEW. I can't find a chink.

SAMSON. In Baborah all walls have eyes.

CHEW. (*Suddenly finding the peephole and looking through at ZILLAH*) Ah!

SAMSON. Well! Anything to report?

CHEW. Ah!

SAMSON. (*Jumping up*) Still another. Write it in your records.

CHEW. What's the hurry?

SAMSON. You may forget the particulars. Here, I'll help you to be exact.

(*He tries to get CHEW away but the lad with a fine sense of duty clutches some climbing vines and remains unbudgeable*)

SAMSON. I suppose she's like all the others?

CHEW. Yes! Only more so.

SAMSON. Well, let me get there. I'll have to make complete data.

CHEW. (*Enthusiastically*) I'm making notes.

SAMSON. I'm beginning to lose faith in you. I don't think you have the psychology of detachment necessary to investigations of this sort.

CHEW. Leave me alone.

SAMSON. (*With conviction*) I know now I could have done this work much better alone.

CHEW. I'd sell my soul in the synagogue if that isn't the finest back in Baborah.

SAMSON. Why did you pose as an innocent phlegmatic?

CHEW. If not — all Asia!

SAMSON. I'll see for myself.

*(And suddenly he climbs the camphor tree
and leans over looking into the garden)*

By the soul of David, the boy's right.

*(He slips down and begins beating on the
door in the wall)*

CHEW. What's the matter?

SAMSON. (*Fiercely indignant*) I'm going to see this thing to the end. I wonder how far the hussy will really go. The elders must know of this.

CHEW. Don't tell them, or there will be no one left at the meetings.

(SAMSON knocks again and MYRAH comes

out of the pavilion followed by the TRAVELLER from the West and the SCHOLAR from the East. As she leaves the house she modestly lowers her face veil)

SCHOLAR. How tenacious is life.

TRAVELLER. I wish I were out of here.

MYRAH. (*Opening the door to SAMSON*) Welcome stranger, will you not enter my garden?

SAMSON. (*Sternly*) Who's the woman below by the fountain?

MYRAH. My slave girl.

SAMSON. Summon her hither.

MYRAH. She is less fair than her mistress.
(*The TRAVELLER and the STRANGER exchange significant glances*)

MYRAH. (*In her most melting voice to SAMSON*) Within are sweet syrups of Asia.

SAMSON. Woman of Baborah, do you know who I am?

MYRAH. Love knows neither place nor station.

(*The TRAVELLER and the SCHOLAR are edging towards the rear of the garden, SAMSON intercepts their base intentions*)

SAMSON. Strangers, leave the garden. (*He unsheaths his scimitar*) I will protect the maidenhood of Baborah.

MYRAH. (*Taking this chivalry unto herself*) My champion! My defender!

SAMSON. Go!

SCHOLAR. (*Falling on his knees*) I must live so as to teach my pupils.

TRAVELLER. (*Making for the door in the wall*) It would be mighty stupid to die here when there are so many other gardens in Baborah.

(*And the SCHOLAR and the TRAVELLER leave by the Road of the Strangers*)

MYRAH. Within are sweet syrups of Asia.

SAMSON. Summon that woman hither!

(*He starts walking up and down in righteous indignation. MYRAH goes to close the door in the garden and seeing CHEW beckons him in and then goes to the back terrace to summon ZILLAH*)

MYRAH. Come up from the mulberries, slave of the veils.

(*The parrot shrieks. SAMSON is startled*)

SAMSON. Are those two prying travellers still without?

(*He rushes out into the road to see*)

MYRAH. Solomon had five hundred wives. Shall Myrah not have one lover? (*Tenderly she approaches CHEW*) Shirk not, sweet youth. Within are sweet syrups of Asia.

(*But catching a glimpse of the lady, the boy runs for his life up the Road of the Strangers, and MYRAH despondently goes*

into the pavilion as SAMSON comes back into the garden and ZILLAH up from the mulberries)

SAMSON. (*Eagerly*) Lift your veil, lady.

ZILLAH. (*Shrinking away from him*) The men of Baborah are less impetuous. God forbid that I should lift my veil. And besides, you mightn't find me beautiful.

SAMSON. Your voice bespeaks your beauty. Shall we go down under the mulberries?

ZILLAH. That spot is sacred to my meditations.

SAMSON. On what do you meditate?

ZILLAH. On the ways of righteousness.

SAMSON. Yes? How old are you?

ZILLAH. Old enough, alas, to have seen my husband turn from me.

SAMSON. What? He must be blinder than the bats of Baborah.

ZILLAH. Nay.

SAMSON. But husbands are ever fools.

ZILLAH. And are you not married?

SAMSON. Do I act like a man who would be fool enough to sacrifice the joy of adventure for the disillusion of habit?

ZILLAH. (*Coyly*) But they say only married men wear beards in Baborah. And if you are not a married man, I should not speak to you alone.

SAMSON. (*Clutching his beard*) I'm a widower.

ZILLAH. Alas! I weep for you and for your wife.

SAMSON. She's long dead. May she rest in peace.

ZILLAH. (*Turning away to hide her laughter*) Still must I weep for you.

SAMSON. (*Coming close to her*) You have a kind heart. I will dry your tears with my kisses. Shall we go down under the mulberries?

ZILLAH. What if my husband should hear of this?

SAMSON. We are far from the city.

ZILLAH. A gossip's tongue knoweth no distance.

SAMSON. Lift your veil.

ZILLAH. (*Sweetly*) And if I lift my veil?

SAMSON. 'Twill be as dawn rise in the desert.
(*He attempts to take her hand*)

ZILLAH. Haste eateth the moment.

SAMSON. I wish you wouldn't quote so much.

ZILLAH. What if my husband should hear of this?

SAMSON. Put not your fear in husbands.

ZILLAH. He is so oldfashioned, he mightn't like it.

SAMSON. Life's a journey towards disillusion. Hasn't he deserted you? Only when you have fled him, will he learn his loss. Come! at noon the caravan leaves for Jerusalem.

ZILLAH. You frighten me. My husband was less rash.

SAMSON. Can a blind lapidary judge a gem? Will you not go with me?

ZILLAH. And leave Baborah?

SAMSON. Yes, yes. The sooner the better. I can't abide its ancient zest for reform.

ZILLAH. What?

SAMSON. I will be loyal to you for ever.

ZILLAH. You will!

SAMSON. By the whale of Jonah I swear to you.

ZILLAH. Swear deeper.

SAMSON. By the ass of Balaam I swear to you.

ZILLAH. Deeper still.

SAMSON. By the soul of my dead wife, I swear to you.

ZILLAH. Then by the soul of your dead wife, will I unveil.

SAMSON. Blessed be her memory.

(She steps back and throws off the veil from her face. He stands in amazement - gazing at her. From the pavilion the voice of MYRAH is heard singing)

"My kisses are as new honey to the lips of my beloved."

SAMSON. *(Very sternly)* What were you doing here in this garden, wife of Baborah?

ZILLAH. (*Dulcetly*) And what have you to say for yourself, husband of Baborah?

SAMSON. (*With new ardour*) Zillah!

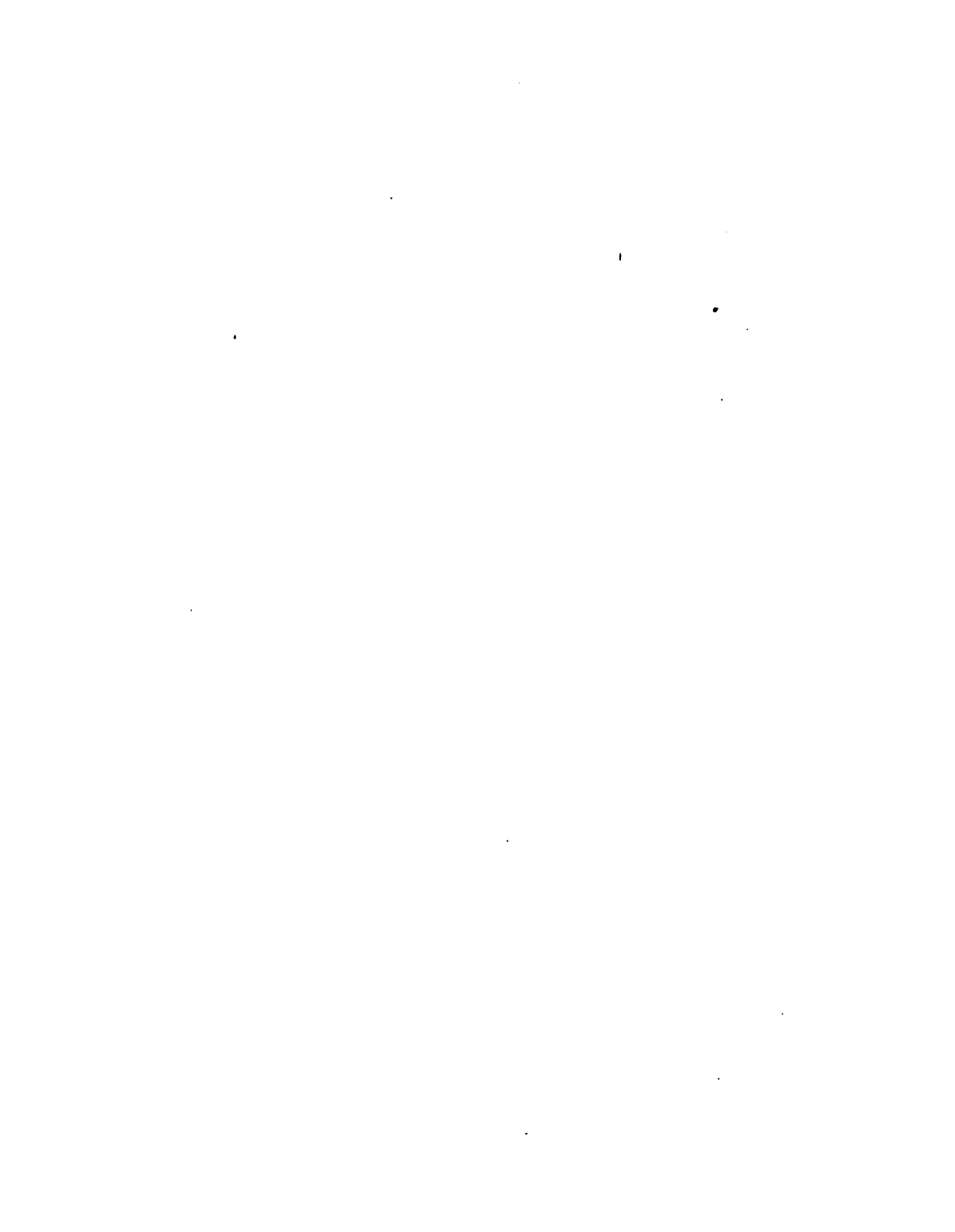
ZILLAH. (*Echoing the note*) Samson!

SAMSON. Zillah, I never knew your back was so beautiful.

ZILLAH. (*Nestling closer to him*) Samson!

SAMSON. And now we will go home and feed the doves.

*(And they go out of the garden together
as the parrot laughs and the curtain falls)*



THE ROADHOUSE IN ARDEN
A Whimsicality

To the Shakespearian Tercentenary
Without which this good deed in that naughty
world might never have been lighted.

CHARACTERS

MASTER HAMLET, *the keeper of the inn.*

MISTRESS CLEOPATRA HAMLET, *his wife.*

MASTER ROBIN GOODFELLOW HAMLET, *their son.*

MISTRESS IMMORTALITY.

SIR FRANCIS B. *two literary men from*

MASTER WILLIAM S. *London.*

THE ROADHOUSE IN ARDEN

The time is: Then.

The scene is:

The Commercial room in the Roadhouse in Arden. It is seven o'clock of a keen spring morning Through the tall mullioned window, half of which is flung open, one sees the edge of the forest and beyond, the yellow-green glimmer of the meadow lands. There is the main door centre and smaller doors right and left. In the left wall is a huge, deep-seated fire-place and in back, a cupboard. In the centre is the long table d'hote of the inn at the end of which sits ROBIN HAMLET, a youth of 18, eating eggs. MASTER HAMLET, his father enters with a feather duster in his hand. He goes over to a peg in the wall and takes down a waiter's apron which he puts on over his traditional costume of black.

ROBIN. At it again, Papa? and so early. You scatter dust better than any man who ever lived.

HAMLET. I have been listening to the crack of the egg-shells and that's the tenth unless I'm mistaken.

ROBIN. You've always found it difficult to have a definite opinion about anything, haven't you?

HAMLET. Is that the way for a child to speak

to his parent? I had much more respect for my father. (*He looks at his father's picture which is hanging from his neck*)

ROBIN. And see what it cost you.

HAMLET. (*Deeply chagrined*) You're your mother's son, all right.

ROBIN. That establishes half my parentage, but why question the rest? You are insulting your own honour. It is just like you though to give yourself all sorts of imaginary troubles.

HAMLET. Have you forgotten the fifth commandment?

ROBIN. Fools make commandments for the wise to forget.

HAMLET. I tremble for your future.

ROBIN. You've always been a splendid trembler, papa.

HAMLET. (*Coming over to him*) You might have left a little breakfast for me and your mother, Just think —

ROBIN. I don't believe in thought. Too much thinking —

HAMLET. So! You have been discussing my past with your mother.

ROBIN. Can't you ever forget your family troubles?

HAMLET. But my memories —

ROBIN. Are nothing but the lash with which yesterday flogs tomorrow.

HAMLET. (*Tearfully*) And today —

ROBIN. (*Jumping up and vaulting across the table*) Today, May is mad with the kiss of April and the lust of summer stirs the spring.

HAMLET. (*Nervously*) You know I don't like these lyric outbursts. Save all that sort of thing for your mother.

ROBIN. (*Laughs, leaps up and sits squat-legged on the table*)

HAMLET. Sit still for a moment and let's face the facts.

ROBIN. All right, papa. Don't you think I am old enough for love?

HAMLET. (*Turning pale*) There are some subjects no self-respecting parent ever discusses with his child. How did you learn such things in the forest here where we never see a newspaper?

ROBIN. There are certain barn-yard facts.

HAMLET. (*Deeply shocked*) So, my innocent boy has learned life from watching the immodesty of nature.

ROBIN. Control yourself, papa, a nervous parent isn't good for a child. (*He breaks another egg*)

HAMLET. You've done it! That's the last egg!

ROBIN. We'll get some more.

HAMLET. More? There isn't a shilling in the house. We haven't had a customer for months and our credit has lost its reputation.

ROBIN. Something's sure to happen. Life can't stand still. Somebody will be passing through the forest.

HAMLET. (*Solemnly*) And in the meantime?

ROBIN. (*Leaping from the table*) Let's be true optimists. We'll forget all about breakfast and look forward to lunch. (MISTRESS HAMLET enters, carrying a miniature obelisk)

MISTRESS HAMLET. Good morning, Robin. I hope your father hasn't been annoying you.

ROBIN. Good morning, mātēr. You're late.

MISTRESS HAMLET. I simply couldn't get out of bed. It was so cosy under the quilts while your clammy father was shaving. Besides I just had to finish those French novels. (*Then to HAMLET*) Well, Ham, why aren't you cleaning up?

HAMLET. (*Timidly*) There are still last night's dishes if — you —

MISTRESS HAMLET. I, mess with those dishes? Not all the perfumes of Arabia could wash away the odour.

HAMLET. But why can't you or Robin help me?

MISTRESS HAMLET. (*Superbly*) Ham! I am trying very hard to be pleasant. Remember my infinite variety, even a queen will turn. (*And she does so, assuming an Egyptian pose*)

HAMLET. Yes, but there's Robin.

MISTRESS HAMLET. (*Rapturously clasping*

ROBIN *to her breast*) My poor fragility! Yes, I suppose you would like this delicate lad to bear your fardles for you. You pitiless parent, can't you see the boy's half starved?

HAMLET. (*Timidly*) Really, my dear.

MISTRESS HAMLET. (*Angrily*) Ham! (HAMLET *begins to dust*) That's right. Dusting is the perfect symbol of your futility. And when you get through come over here and polish up the heir-loom. (*She points to the obelisk which she puts on the table*)

ROBIN. What is it anyway?

MISTRESS HAMLET. What difference does that make? Where is your pride of blood? Hasn't it come down for generations?

ROBIN. But what's the good of it?

MISTRESS HAMLET. (*Towering in indignant majesty*) What's the good of it? I can't breathe in such a Philistine atmosphere. To you and your father, I suppose, nothing is good unless it's useful. Thank God, I'm a woman. Too much practicality chokes me and always has. I'd as lief die this minute. (*Then tragically*) I have immortal longings in me. Give me some breakfast.

(HAMLET looks at ROBIN in consternation for ROBIN has eaten everything, but the situation is saved, for at this moment a snatch of song is heard in the forest and simultaneously they each emit the same word)

HAMLET	}	A customer!
MISTRESS HAMLET		
ROBIN		

(And the next moment the girl, IMMORTALITY bounds into the room)

IMMORTALITY. May I rest here a moment?

MISTRESS HAMLET. We'll do our best to make you comfortable.

IMMORTALITY. I seldom stay where I'm wanted.

ROBIN. Have you come far?

IMMORTALITY. Yes, I have been racing with the years.

ROBIN. We weren't expecting you.

IMMORTALITY. Then I'll stay. Is any one else at the inn?

HAMLET. We haven't had a soul for months.

MISTRESS HAMLET. *(Aside)* Fool!

IMMORTALITY. At last I have eluded them.

HAMLET. I hope you are not referring to your parents.

IMMORTALITY. I never had any parents. The stars were my cradle, the life of man my jumping-jack, and Time my nurse.

HAMLET. Am I to understand?

ROBIN. Don't try to, papa. You've never understood anything.

IMMORTALITY. I was found on the steps of a foundling hospital with a strange little note in my hand.

ROBIN. What did it say?

HAMLET. Robin, perhaps the young lady would rather not.

IMMORTALITY. Oh, I don't mind. Eventually I tell everything. These were the words: "Your mother is fame and your father is tomorrow."

ROBIN. (*Laughing*) I've been waiting for you. Let's be friends.

MISTRESS HAMLET. (*Eying her up and down*) She has probably escaped from a sanitarium.

HAMLET. She seems quite sane to me.

MISTRESS HAMLET. You are no judge. (*Then to IMMORTALITY*) What are you doing here, an unprotected girl, alone in the Forest of Arden?

IMMORTALITY. I'm running away.

MISTRESS HAMLET. (*Deeply*) Young lady, I come from a long line of emotional ancestors and I understand many things. From whom and from what are you running away?

IMMORTALITY. From man.

MISTRESS HAMLET. I thought as much.

IMMORTALITY. Just at this moment, to be more specific, I am attempting to elude two gentlemen who pursue me everywhere.

ROBIN. I'll teach them, the fools.

IMMORTALITY. I don't take them seriously.

ROBIN. Why not?

IMMORTALITY. They are literary men.

HAMLET. Don't speak slightly of literature.
To be or not to be —

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MISTRESS HAMLET. (*Terribly*) Ham, don't finish that. (*Then to IMMORTALITY*) Well, go on with your story.

IMMORTALITY. I don't want to interrupt your husband's soliloquy.

MISTRESS HAMLET. The only excuse for a soliloquy *is* its interruption.

HAMLET. (*Timidly*) Cleo, I wish you would let me finish.

MISTRESS HAMLET. Hamlet, I don't want you to say another word. Go over there and sit in the corner. (*And HAMLET does so*)

MISTRESS HAMLET. Well Miss, what about these two gentlemen?

IMMORTALITY. If I mentioned their names you might know them.

MISTRESS HAMLET. Very probably. Who are they?

ROBIN. Gossip!

MISTRESS HAMLET. Be quiet, Robin.

IMMORTALITY. Please don't ask him to be quiet. He seems to have a charming sense of humour.

HAMLET. (*At a loss*) What's *that*?

ROBIN. Something that might have saved you, daddy.

MISTRESS HAMLET. Well, what about these two gentlemen?

IMMORTALITY. Their ridiculous attention embarrasses me. I escape from one only to encounter

the other. There was no place in town where I could hide from them. I thought I was safe at my club. It's called the Sunnyside of Olympus Club. But I wasn't. One of them, the philosopher, found me out and appeared there the next day disguised as the head-waiter. I had to resign, of course.

MISTRESS HAMLET. I, too, have had illuminating experiences with men — the *brutes*. (*And she glares at HAMLET*)

ROBIN. Don't start that, mother. Like all emotional women, you've saved for the future what you've squandered in the past.

MISTRESS HAMLET. Hold your tongue or as old as you are, I'll box your ears. (*And then to IMMORTALITY*) Go on, dear, tell me everything.

IMMORTALITY. There isn't much more to tell. After I left my Club I joined a troupe of players passing through London. I seemed really to have got away but the following week the poet arrived and joined the company as chief clown.

ROBIN. For a brief moment discarding his disguise.

HAMLET. (*Traditionally*) All the world's a stage —

ROBIN. And life's its seamstress, changing the sackcloth of yesterday into the motley of tomorrow.

MISTRESS HAMLET. (*With growing agitation*) No one asked either of you to recite.

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IMMORTALITY. I am beginning to like your son.

ROBIN. I knew you would. I liked you from the beginning.

MISTRESS HAMLET. (*With maternal protection*) Aren't two men enough? (*And then sweetly*) Finish your story.

IMMORTALITY. Back in London I sent a charming obituary of myself to the papers.

MISTRESS HAMLET. Am I to understand that you are dead?

IMMORTALITY. No, *I* am alive forever.

MISTRESS HAMLET. So you're a ghost!

HAMLET. (*Dropping his duster and all atremble hiding behind MISTRESS HAMLET*) Don't say that, I couldn't survive another.

IMMORTALITY. My funeral was only a subterfuge.

ROBIN. I don't believe in funerals and baked meats.

IMMORTALITY. You would have liked mine. I had the most distinguished pall-bearers.

MISTRESS HAMLET. Yes.

IMMORTALITY. Adam and Guinivere and the Queen of Sheba and Harold The Saxon.

HAMLET. (*Aside, to MISTRESS HAMLET*) She seems to know a lot of nice people.

MISTRESS HAMLET. We'll charge her twice as much as usual.

IMMORTALITY. And now all the world believes

me dead, but here I am in Arden, free at last and rid forever of all stupid suitors. Oh, I'm so happy!

ROBIN. (*Gaily*) And so am I!

HAMLET. (*Very lugubriously*) To be conscious of happiness is to hear Nemesis rapping at the portals.

IMMORTALITY. Nevertheless I'm happy.

(*But at this moment there is a knock at the door. HAMLET and MISTRESS HAMLET again emit the same hopeful sound: "A customer." IMMORTALITY in dumb show suggests that ROBIN see who it is. He goes to the window and then tip-toes back to her*)

ROBIN. It's a man with a big book.

IMMORTALITY. (*In despair*) It's Francis.

ROBIN. Let me manage him.

(*And he shoves HAMLET and MISTRESS HAMLET from the room through the door right and hides IMMORTALITY in the room on the left. The knock is repeated*)

ROBIN. Come in.

(*And FRANCIS BACON, an unmistakable philosopher, enters carrying a huge book under his arm*)

FRANCIS. Sst! Is there anybody in the inn?

ROBIN. (*Bowing*) Your humble servant.

FRANCIS. (*Looking about*) I am in search of a young girl.

ROBIN. There is nobody in the house but me,

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and father and mother, and they are upstairs in bed.

FRANCIS. Who are your parents?

ROBIN. MASTER and MISTRESS HAMLET.

FRANCIS. (*Surprised*) I didn't know there was a Mistress Hamlet.

ROBIN. There are more things than are dreamed of in your philosophy.

FRANCIS. What would you do with a crisp pound note?

ROBIN. Up to ten minutes ago I should have said run up to London for a holiday.

FRANCIS. Somewhere in the forest a young lady is hiding.

(*The girl peeps through the door*)

ROBIN. In the forest?

FRANCIS. She is attempting to avoid me.

ROBIN. Impossible.

FRANCIS. (*With a bit of a swagger*) Oh, its only temporary, of course. She can't escape me for long. Find her for me and the pound is yours.

ROBIN. Make it a guinea and I'll look for her tomorrow.

FRANCIS. Tomorrow may be too late.

ROBIN. Why?

FRANCIS. Can you keep a secret?

ROBIN. How can I tell 'til you have told me?

FRANCIS. There is some one else searching for her too.

ROBIN. No!

FRANCIS. But the quest is mine for today at least. Friend William doesn't suspect that I know that he is tracking her. He's very shrewd. He sent me an anonymous letter to lead me astray but I tricked him this time.

ROBIN. How?

FRANCIS. I sent him an anonymous letter and by now he is safe on the road to Richmond where he thinks she is waiting for him.

ROBIN. You are very ingenious. You ought to be a dramatist.

FRANCIS. (*Chagrined*) I leave drama to duller wits, like William. My, how I could enjoy a laugh at his expense. (*And he begins to chuckle softly*)

ROBIN. Why don't you?

FRANCIS. (*Stopping*) Laughter does not become a philosopher.

ROBIN. Are you afraid you will strain your soul?

FRANCIS. (*Disputatiously*) How can one strain the non-existent? I haven't yet established the soul as an entity. That's one of the things I promised to do if only that elusive girl would come and keep house for me.

ROBIN. How long do you give me to find her for you?

FRANCIS. The sooner the better. I have philo-

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sophic premonitions. (*Then mysteriously*) I see things as in a crystal.

ROBIN. You must meet mamma. She loves fortune telling too.

FRANCIS. Forebodings beset me. I feel that if she isn't mine in fifteen minutes I may lose her for ever. "There is a tide —"

ROBIN. What's that?

FRANCIS. A trifle of William's.

ROBIN. Why stop to quote?

FRANCIS.

It is a hopeless habit of philosophers.

But now,

The field is free and high adventure hangs
Upon the moment.

ROBIN. Why, what is the matter with you, are you speaking verse?

FRANCIS. I feel a spiritual influence.

(And at this moment there is another knock at the door. FRANCIS starts back. A moment's pause. Then he bids ROBIN see who it is. ROBIN goes to the window, looks out, and then tip-toes back to FRANCIS)

ROBIN. It's a man with a Vandyke beard.

FRANCIS. (*Breathless*) Anachronistic, but no matter. It's William. Quick, hide me.

(ROBIN pushes him into the high back settle of the fireplace, as WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE opens the door and comes in)

WILLIAM. Good morrow, Puck.

ROBIN. I am Robin Goodfellow, and my name's not Puck.

WILLIAM.

It will be, henceforth and for ever!
I christen you anew, transmuting Robin,
By the bright alchemy of singing sounds,
To Puck, pert symbol of eternal laughter.
Is any one at home?

ROBIN. Only me and father and mother and they're upstairs in bed.

(And FRANCIS hopefully expecting more iambs begins assiduously scribbling in his great book all the verses WILLIAM speaks)

WILLIAM.

Bidding the day drowse laggard in the lap
Of Night. And who's your father, Puck?

ROBIN. My father's name is Hamlet and my mother's name is Mistress Cleopatra Hamlet.

WILLIAM.

A combination greatly to be dreaded.

Alas, poor Hamlet. *(And for the moment it is prose)* I knew him, Puck. A fellow of perpetual sighs and melancholy fancies.

You say the inn is empty, jack-a-napes,
Save for the snores of those two ancient lovers
One flight up?

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ROBIN. There hasn't been a soul come here in months.

WILLIAM.

Have you, perchance, by some blest mishap seen
A maiden in the woodlands?

ROBIN. Some one may be wandering in the forest.

WILLIAM.

What would a gleaming guinea mean to you?

ROBIN. The first tip I've had since Christmas.

WILLIAM.

Bring me the lady hither and the trash
Is yours.

ROBIN. I'll look for her tomorrow.

WILLIAM.

Tomorrow and tomorrow, no, my lad!
There is a glass called opportunity
All pregnant with bright prophecies, if man
But read at the propitious moment.
But,—let the fecund second slip and lo!
The globule tumbles from his coward's hands
Splintering a rain of lost for evers
Upon the sunless stretches of the world.

ROBIN. (*Mystified*) I don't think that I understand you.

WILLIAM. (*Smilingly*) Very few people do at a first hearing. I'll make it two guineas if you find the girl instanta.

ROBIN. Why such unpremeditated haste? Is the lady well to do?

WILLIAM.

She's richer than the rubied Mexique mine
For with the tingling penny of her name
She spells eternity.

Can you keep a secret?

ROBIN. A secret's not a secret 'til it's shared by two.

WILLIAM. Properly turned, that might make a charming couplet. Listen, boy.

ROBIN. Yes, sir.

WILLIAM. There is some one else looking for the lady too, a very learned gentleman.

ROBIN. If the other fellow is so clever he will find her first.

WILLIAM. (*Angrily*) Atom! Fellow me no fellows. No Puck, Sir Francis doesn't suspect I know he's tracking her. He's very shrewd. He sent me an anonymous letter to lead me astray, but I tricked him this time.

(FRANCIS and the girl are anxiously listening)

ROBIN. How?

WILLIAM. I sent him an anonymous letter and by now he is safely on the way to Windsor, where he thinks the girl's awaiting him. Ha! Ha!
(*He stops short*)

ROBIN. What's the matter?

WILLIAM.

My laugh is out of joint, oh cursèd spite!
A laugh's not laughter that's not laughed out-
right.

(FRANCIS *peeps from behind the settle*)

ROBIN. I'm sorry for you. (*He sees FRANCIS*)
So you can't laugh either.

WILLIAM. Only with difficulty, since my marriage.

ROBIN. Yes?

WILLIAM. When I bartered my priceless bachelorhood for Ann's disappointing virginity, my sense of comedy became so poignant that now I'm for ever hearing the echo of old tears in the ripple of new laughter.

ROBIN. It must be very un-funny to be a humourist.

WILLIAM. Nothing is more tragic. If I could only recapture my early manner, I think I might persuade my runaway daughter to abide with me.

(*On hearing this, the girl who has been watching both FRANCIS and WILLIAM, can contain herself no longer and bursts into an unrestrained peal of merriment*)

WILLIAM. What's that?

ROBIN. What?

WILLIAM.

That voice — that sudden sweet and silver voice,

More mellow than the chanting cherubim
In holy hallelujahs at the feet
Of God.

ROBIN. Be still. If it's she and she hears you speaking poetry, she'll probably be too frightened to come in.

(And ROBIN pushes WILLIAM into the seat of the fire-place opposite FRANCIS. The girl runs over and hides behind the settle. And ROBIN taking a bellows from the chimney piece blows up the flame. WILLIAM and FRANCIS seeing each other, spring up)

WILLIAM.

Angels and ministers of grace defend me.

Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned.

FRANCIS. *(Stepping out into the room)* Stop quoting me, William!

WILLIAM. Alas, poor ghost.

FRANCIS. You know perfectly well that no theory of spiritualism has ever been irrefutably proved.

WILLIAM. *(Coming forward)* That being so all I can say is:

Oh, that your too, too solid flesh would melt.

FRANCIS. I heard you. It's disgraceful the way you are treating Mistress Hathaway Shakespeare. Running after a young girl like this.

WILLIAM. With my wife I have nothing to reproach myself.

FRANCIS. Why not?

WILLIAM. As a shrine for memory, I have willed her my best bedstead.

FRANCIS. Is that the way to repay me for writing half your plays for you?

WILLIAM. Only in return for my writing most of your essays.

FRANCIS. Oh, sharper than the serpent's tooth.

WILLIAM. Even because you're excited, you needn't divulge our literary secrets.

FRANCIS. (*Fuming*)

Thou canst not but be false to every man.

WILLIAM. Francis, don't,—even because you are angry — don't misquote me.

FRANCIS. (*Storming*) Angry, nothing in the world can make *me* angry. I'm a philosopher. Come let's search the house!

(They start to do so, but this is too much for ROBIN and the girl who have been violently flirting behind the settle, and their laughter startles the two literary men. They are going on tip-toe in the direction of the settle, but ROBIN suddenly rushes to the window and points in the direction of the forest)

ROBIN. Look, there in the sunlight, there she is.

(And FRANCIS and WILLIAM bolt madly from the room)

IMMORTALITY. Your wit works swift as laughter.

ROBIN. (*Turning to her*) You're safe, and now my wages, please.

IMMORTALITY. Some day I'll pay you with a kiss.

ROBIN. Some day? I've forfeited my London holiday and now, you bid me be a ten years' pilgrim, questing the scarlet altar of your lips.

IMMORTALITY. I didn't say ten years. (*She comes toward him*) A kiss is but a little sweetness.

ROBIN. Leaping the road to rapture. (*They kiss*)

ROBIN. (*Recovering*) Oh, I am dizzy with eternity. Come, let's lose ourselves in Arden.

(*ROBIN takes her hand*)

IMMORTALITY. Wait but a moment, I shall leave them, this.

(*During this speech, she breaks off some leaves of her laurel crown and drops them on the table*)

For memory of me, that they may be remembered.

ROBIN. Come, come. And none will ever find us, wandering the tangle of sweet ways, leading for ever — nowhere.

IMMORTALITY. Who are you?

ROBIN. (*Lyrically*) I am youth and my faith is laughter. And who are you?

IMMORTALITY. (*And she must make the words*

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seem to glitter) I am Immortality and my faith is youth.

(Then hand in hand, they rush to the door, but stop suddenly, hearing the voices of FRANCIS and WILLIAM, as the poet and philosopher come up the path. They slink behind the door, and as it flies open, and WILLIAM and FRANCIS burst into the room, ROBIN and the girl leap through the open window and disappear into the forest)

FRANCIS. *(Storming)* There was nothing there but a rooster shrieking dominion on his heap of garbage.

WILLIAM.

Life, must I ever smother with mine aged
Sagacity, this sudden summer swift
With too sweet passing, that hath stirred
The falling autumn of my days.

FRANCIS. *(For the philosophic digression quite disgusts him)* That's it, soliloquize instead of helping me find the boy!

(And at this moment the girl's song is heard in the distance)

WILLIAM. Oh, my prophetic soul they've gone for ever! *(He sees the laurel on the table)*
What's this! A branch of new plucked laurel?

FRANCIS. *(Furious)* That's it, poetize!!!

WILLIAM. Soft, soft, there is an odour of eter-

nity about us! (*He breaks off a sprig of the laurel*)

And here's a leaf for you, friend Francis.

(*And FRANCIS infuriated throws the leaf
to the floor while the curtain' falls*)

POKEY
OR
*The Beautiful Legend of the
Amorous Indian
A Cartoon Comedy*

*To Carlo
Who one evening said, Why not one about the
Indians?*

CHARACTERS

POWHATAN, *Chief at Werowocomoco.*

MRS P., *his Squaw.*

THE ELDER MRS. P., *his mother.*

POKEY, *better known to History as The Princess
Pocahontas.*

STORM IN THE EYE.	}	<i>Three young Braves.</i>
HAIL IN THE NOSE.		
WIND IN THE EAR.		

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH, *of Virginia.*

JOHN ROLFE, *of Somersetshire.*

POKEY

The scene is: —

In the neighbourhood of the unpronounceable Werowocomoco where POWHATAN is Chief. The entire beautiful legend is played on top and at the foot of a tall cliff on a plateau overlooking a valley.

Far away spread the plains, and in the distance are the mountains on the horizon beyond Werowocomoco — if there are any mountains on the horizon in the distance beyond Werowocomoco. But what difference does it make? This is history not fact.

The scene should be wild and beautiful, — beautiful with all the wildness of an unrestrained and savage school. It should be permeated with a J. Fenimore Cooperish autumnal atmosphere because, — though the piece is played during Spring and Summer — one always associates Indians with Autumn, and so we'll have the time autumnal.

The pace of the play should be breathless, fraught perpetually with a sense of imminent danger as though painted red men lurked behind every tree, if the theatre is rich enough to afford trees; and as though the wind were bright with the glint of flying tomahawks. It is doubtful if even the little Art theatres, where everything is done for nothing can

compass this effect. But in all probability the play can get on without it.

Between scenes one and two the curtain drops for a moment to denote the passing of Spring into Summer. Lest this interval be too short for the imagination of the audience to allow for the flow of several months, a prominent bush which is in bud in scene one should be in blossom in scene two. This is one of the deftest tricks in the modern theatre and the illusion is almost always — nothing. But in the playhouse, which is the world of the great make-believe, one must be imaginative, otherwise what is to become of Art?

But lest this digression outlength the play it might be wise to notice that the curtain has already gone up, and there above on the cliff's edge is ROLFE of Somersetshire in the mad embrace of something, of some strange and beautifully befeathered creature which might be the fantastic cross between a bird of paradise and an orangoutang, if such a mating were a possibility. But, no! we who are — so to speak, "in on it," know that it is POKEY, better known to those hungry for History, as THE PRINCESS POCAHONTAS.

ROLFE. (*Terribly embarrassed, now that the audience is looking on*) In the name of our Virgin Queen, whoever, whatever you are, let me go.

POKEY. (*Furiously kissing him*) Um, Um, Um, No, No, Um, Um!

ROLFE. Bird or beast, woman or fiend, devil or nightmare, kill me or let me go. I'm a helpless scientist up against nature and I can't be expected to defend myself against a woman,—if you are a woman.

POKEY. Um, Um.

ROLFE. I haven't been able to take sufficient data but I'm sure, almost sure, that you have certain womanly attributes.

POKEY. (*Continuing her osculations*) Um, Um, Um.

ROLFE. But you mustn't kiss me to death. There's no such death on record. There's death by drowning, death by suffocation, death by poison, not to mention natural death, but not death by —

POKEY. (*Shutting off his statistics*) Um, Um, I love you, white man. For days I've lain in the tall grass coiled like a snake waiting for you, my white flower. Um. Um. Um.

ROLFE. Stop it, I can't breathe.

POKEY. Um. Um.

ROLFE. In the long run you needn't think you can get the better of me. I'm a widower. (*They have rolled over near the cliff's edge*) Good God, look out. That's a drop of a thousand feet. If I had my spy glass with me I could tell you exactly how deep it is.

POKEY. The pink has fled from the face of the white man and he looks like the west in the dawn.

I desire the lips of the white man. (*She presses closer to him*)

ROLFE. This is no time for verse.

POKEY. Poetry swims in my veins. It is the blood of my father's mother. Um. (*Another embrace*)

ROLFE. There now, you've dented my new botany box.

POKEY. Um. Um.

ROLFE. (*Vainly struggling in her strangle clutch of love*) I can't use force on a woman.

POKEY. Um. Um.

ROLFE. For God's sake be careful. (*They have rolled closer to the cliff's edge*)

POKEY. Look, my beloved, see the smoke from the wigwams below in the valley, wigwams of the Kalsabookies. (*He is leaning far out over the cliff*) How does nature look when you see it upside down? We are at the cliff's edge.

ROLFE. Yes, I am a scientist. I can feel facts. To think that botany should have brought me to this.

POKEY. Um. Um.

ROLFE. Look out, in another moment you'll throw me over into the valley.

POKEY. (*Very sweetly*) I will throw you over unless you do as I bid you.

ROLFE. (*Trembling*) What?

POKEY. (*Dramatically*) Either you take me back to the camp of the Werowocomoco, and marry me before my father's people — marry me, I say,— I'm not to be trifled with even though I am an innocent Indian maiden — (*She kisses him*) — marry me, you understand or (*And she leans across his body and looks eagerly into the abyss*) over you go.

ROLFE. Help! Help!

POKEY. Only the eagles of the air hear you nor do the vultures of the mountain answer. Fate's ways seem devious but straight as a fleeting arrow sooner or later fate strikes.

(*And then Indian fashion she begins chanting*)

I the loveless Princess Pokey

In a few words tell you white man

ROLFE. (*Interrupting*) That rhythm sounds familiar.

POKEY. (*Undisturbed*)

Either you will wed and squaw me

Or you'll drop, you understand me

To those wigwams in the valley

Wigwams of the cheek boned Pawnees

Of the Omahas and Hurons

Of the Ojibways and Choctaws —

I could list ad infinitum,

But these few are quite sufficient

To elucidate my meaning.

ROLFE. This is simply outrageous!

POKEY.

Wigwams of the Comanaches

Wigwams of the swift Shoshomies.

ROLFE. (*Desperately*) But I tell you I'm a widower.

POKEY. That makes no difference. What you lack in spontaneity I shall supply with imagination.

ROLFE. (*Still squirming for a way out*) Though you could hardly believe it, I'm past forty.

POKEY. Ripe as a second harvest of corn. Love is ever young, my beloved. Choose, my pale face.

(And she clutches him by the scalp and holds him perilously out over the cliff)

You are whiter than a water lily in the keen kiss of the dawn. I hope you don't mind my being poetic. I can not help it under any circumstances.

(And she yanks him back to a sitting posture)

POKEY. Well? Choose!

ROLFE. (*Weakly*) I suppose I'll have to marry you.

POKEY. (*Recapturing the ardour of the moment*) My sparrow, my primrose, my stone that sparkles.

ROLFE. But just the same, I'll insist to my dying day that you took an unfair advantage of me.

(He looks timidly at POKEY. Suddenly

with a wild paroxysm of passion she clutches him to her breast)

POKEY.

You will give me eight fierce bravelings,
Eight fierce bravelings my beloved.

ROLFE. (*With a tremendous effort attempting to free himself*) No! No! Not that.

POKEY. Maybe nine fierce bravelings. Nine, to hunt the bison, my beloved.

ROLFE. (*Frantically*) No, No. I've done my duty. I've married once. No more can be expected of any man.

(*They are at the very edge of the cliff*)

POKEY. (*Lyricaly*) Have you no faith in the gentle flame of my heart?

ROLFE. Help! help! Has the God of the English forsaken me. Help, Help!

(*He is three quarters over when suddenly from a nearby thicket a voice thunders back*)

VOICE. No, by the dragon of St. George, I tell you, no.

(*And the next second, JOHN SMITH of Virginia springs from behind the rocks above the cliff and catching the fainting ROLFE in his arms leaps with him to the plateau below*)

ROLFE. (*Swooning*) Saved!

POKEY. (*Tragically from the cliff's edge*) You know I can't jump after you in these skirts. Be-

sides there are two of you. Two men are one too many for any woman.

JOHN SMITH. (*To ROLFE*) Here, drink. (*He presses a pocket flask to ROLFE's lips*) It's the last drop, but drink. When in danger, I remember the heroes. Have you ever heard of Philip Sidney? Drink. Drink. I'm not thirsty. There! There! I remember the heroes, besides I have another flask.

POKEY. (*Darkly*) Some day you will rue this.

JOHN SMITH. Beg pardon — Were you speaking to me?

POKEY. An Indian never forgets. I will whisper my will to the wind and tell my scorn to the dawn and the days will gather and gather and some autumn I'll glean my harvest of hate.

JOHN SMITH. Very picturesque — very.

POKEY. He was so willing. And you have taken him from me. Remember, an Indian never forgets. Beware of the scalp knife.

(*And she is gone and ROLFE falls weakly to the ground*)

JOHN SMITH. (*Very English*) Look here now, you mustn't die, you're in decent company again.

POKEY'S VOICE. Remember!

ROLFE. Eight young braves to hunt the bison. Oh! The thought of it.

(*He is about to swoon again when JOHN SMITH presses the second flask to his lips*)

ROLFE. (*Recovering*) You are my saviour. With my first breath of returning life I pledge you by the unsullied honour of our Virgin Queen, our Virgin Queen, Queen Bess. (*And traditionally their hands shoot skyward*) that whenever, wherever, whatever you ask of me, I'll do your bidding.

POKEY'S VOICE. (*Further off*) Remember!

ROLFE. That's beginning to make me nervous.

JOHN SMITH. Are you afraid of echoes?

ROLFE. No. Of the future. She had such a way with her.

POKEY'S VOICE. (*Still further off*) Remember!

ROLFE. (*Giving JOHN SMITH his hand*) Whatever you may ask.

JOHN SMITH. That's very nice of you old chap. And now let's go back to Jamestown and have a dish of tea.

(And as they go off POKEY's voice sounds almost inaudibly in the distance as the curtain falls)

Scene Two

The same cliff's edge with the unaltered beauty of the distant vista. This time it should be lit with noonlight, noonlight three months later. A wigwam has been set up at the cliff's edge and POWHATAN and MRS. P, his wife, sit quietly smoking their pipes whilst the three young braves dance a war dance perilously near the edge of the plateau. On

a clothes line near the wigwam, silhouetted against the shimmering distance, are hung a few Indian intimacies including one of MR. P's red flannel shirts, and some nice new scalps drying in the morning sun. Every now and then POWHATAN lazily beats on a tom-tom.

MRS. P. You're losing your sense of rhythm, my dear. That's twice in the last three hours that you've dropped a beat. The flies are terrible this morning. *(And she brushes them from POWHATAN's body with a whisp of the straw with which she is weaving baskets)*

POWHATAN. Ugh!

MRS. P. *(As she looks at the braves)* Don't you think they might stop dancing for a little while? It's beginning to make me nervous. They've been practising that war dance since seven o'clock this morning and if they keep it up much longer they'll wake mamma. *(She glances alarmedly towards the wigwam)* And you wouldn't like that any more than I, would you? Can't they stop?

POWHATAN. *(As if he didn't care,— as indeed he doesn't — whether they do or not)* Ugh!

MRS. P. *(Addressing the braves)* Braves!

(And STORM IN THE EYE and HAIL IN THE NOSE and WIND IN THE EAR are about to cease their Terpsichorean exertions when suddenly from the wigwam sounds the ancient voice of old MRS. P.)

OLD MRS. P. (*Within*)

Do not stop their dancing, daughter.

'Tis the one tradition left us.

MRS. P. There now, she's awake. (*She calls in to the wigwam*) All right. (*And then to the braves*) You can finish that around the corner, boys. (*And the three braves exit and then to POWHATAN*) Mamma's becoming positively exasperating. Ever since I've been selling baskets in Jamestown and listening to the white people I've got new ideas about old things. Just think of making those poor boys dance 'till they're all covered with perspiration. And why I ask you, why? Just because she insists on sticking to the old ways.

POWHATAN. Ugh!

MRS. P. It's positively degenerate. That's what it is. Here we are, seven of us sleeping in that stuffy little wigwam, whilst in Jamestown not more than two people sleep in one bed.

POWHATAN. Ugh!

MRS. P. I suppose we ought to humour mamma, poor mamma, she's a hundred and eight. Soon she'll be slipping to the happy hunting ground.

POWHATAN. (*Glaring*) Ugh!

MRS. P. Oh, I understand you all right, you nasty old man, I suppose we women don't go to the happy hunting ground? Do we? But what you men are supposed to hunt for in the happy hunting ground if it isn't for us women the great spirit only

knows. (*And jauntily she arranges a rose that is tucked in her hair*)

POWHATAN. Ugh!

MRS. P. Ever since we've been here you've been just too disagreeable for words, and it doesn't agree with mamma at all up here.

(*She glances towards the wigwam*)

I'm worried to death about her. Poor mamma, she looks dreadful. She's as pale as a brick.

POWHATAN. Ugh!

MRS. P. In the name of the red plumage of the sun, can't those poor boys rest a moment. (*She calls to them*) Braves! (*Again the voice from the wigwam*)

VOICE OF OLD MRS. P.

Do not stop their dancing, daughter.

'Tis the one tradition left us.

MRS. P. She's so querulous now that she's got so few scalps to hang about the place. There's only one thing worse than tradition and that's believing in it.

POWHATAN. Ugh!

MRS. P. And why did you come up here at all, I ask you? Why? Just because Pokey wanted you to. By the silver feathers of the moon you spoil that child. It was so much better for mamma at our nice little two-room wigwam in the suburbs down in the valley. All I had to do was to run out into the swamp at any moment and bring in two nice

fat juicy rattlers for lunch, whilst up here prices are higher than the mountains. Sometimes I wish I were dead. I do. I do.

POWHATAN. (*With just a slight tinge of affirmation*) Ugh!

MRS. P. (*Looking up*) What's that? (*But as POWHATAN is carefully unresponsive, she goes on*) All the bother of moving to humour a moody girl.

VOICE OF OLD MRS. P. (*Her head appearing through a flap in the wigwam*)

In the valley from the mountain

I can see the little wigwams,

Wigwams of my Injun people.

MRS. P. (*Looking into the tent*) Oh, do keep quiet mother.

(*Then to POWHATAN*)

When she talks in that old manner it nearly drives me crazy.

VOICE OF OLD MRS. P.

Bid the braves come in and bear me

To the open windy places.

MRS. P. It isn't a bit windy out here. But she doesn't care what she says as long as she sticks to the rhythm.

(*She turns to the dancers*)

You can stop dancing now, boys, and go in and help mamma out of bed and bring her out here so she can get the sun.

(And the three braves go into the tent and in a moment come out bearing between them old MRS. P. who is the marvel of the Werowocomoco being one hundred and eight and still in the chant)

MRS. P. *(Pointing to a huge rock near the wigwam)* Lean her up against that nice soft boulder. *(And they do so)*

OLD MRS. P.

Soon my eyesight will be failing
And no more I'll see the valleys
With the wigwam smoke ascending
Wigwams of my Injun people.

(She lifts her hands to her eyes and leans out gazing across the distances)

MRS. P. For goodness' sakes, be careful, mamma, or you'll tumble over. You worry me to death. You with your chanting and Pokey with her moods. What's come over the child? She's been acting so crazy ever since we came up here. Look, there she is now at the cliff's edge rubbing her cheeks in the grass.

(And they look up and there is POKEY as she has been ever since the beginning of the scene but just because she hasn't said anything no one has noticed her)

MRS. P. *(Calling up to her)* What's the matter, darling?

POKEY. *(Sadly)* It's nigh the summer's end

and he hasn't come back. But he will, he will.
(*And she puts her hand to her mouth and calls across the valley*) Remember!

MRS. P. She's driving me frantic with all that free verse. And what does her father say to her. Not a word. He's about as stern as a toad.

OLD MRS. P.

Oh, my daughter, let your daughter
Cry her anguish to the mountains.

MRS. P. (*Angrily*) But why did he have to humour her by bringing her up here at all?

OLD MRS. P.

I will tell you why her papa
Left our wigwam in the suburbs
Cause the medcin man advised us
That a change of air was needed
As poor Pokey was quite run down
Brooding on some secret sorrow.
When we asked her where she'd like to
Go to spend July and August,
Didn't she as quick as scalping
Choose this mountain side for camping?

MRS P. But why did she insist on coming to this very cliff? Why, I ask you?

OLD MRS. P.

Whimsical a maiden's fancies
In the season when the sapling
Knows the urge of mounting springtide.
Even thus our bashful Pokey

Feels the pulse of life within her
But she doesn't understand it.

POKEY. He will come back and like swift arrows my kisses will wound his lips. (*She leaves the cliff's edge*)

MRS. P. What's that she's saying? I'm sure a snake has bitten her. If I had my way, I'd beat her with a birch. I'm a modern mother, I am.

OLD MRS. P.

As the taut bow speeds the arrow
As the eaglet seeks its mother —

MRS. P. (*Breaking in*) You've got more similies than I have troubles.

OLD MRS. P. (*Continuing, undaunted*)

As the torrent tumbles downward
So the maiden's heart is crying
For the kisses of a lover.

MRS. P. (*Terribly excited*) Be quiet, be quiet. If that's what's the matter aren't things bad enough without your yelling the news from a mountain top? So that explains it. That's why every brave has left the tribe. On account of Pokey's hectic manners. Every one except you three boobies. (*She points to the braves*) And you can't do anything but dance.

(*And POKEY enters singing the opening phrase of "From the Land of the Sky-blue Waters." Her feathers are wilted, her whole manner the symbol of dejection*)

POKEY. (*Tragically*) Isn't lunch ready? All that's left me is to eat.

MRS. P. (*Humouring her*) And now come here like a good girl and tell mamma all about it.

POKEY. (*Throwing herself on the ground next to her GRANDMOTHER*) I have bathed in the cool waters but my soul is still athirst.

(*Then suddenly she jumps up and rushes over to the braves*)

MRS. P. Now you just leave those poor boys alone. They're all that's left of your papa's people.

POKEY. (*To one of the braves*) Hail in the Nose I will tell you stories. (*And HAIL IN THE NOSE begins to dance*)

POKEY. (*To another*) Storm in the Eye I will unbraid my braids for you. (*And he begins to dance*)

POKEY. (*Desperately to the third*) Wind in the Ear I will knit you moccasins. (*And he too begins to dance*)

MRS. P. Come over here, Pokey.

(*She goes over and leads POKEY away from the braves*)

Nothing seems to interest you, not even those nice new scalps that your father brought in last night.

(*And she points to the hirsute trophies hanging on the clothes line*)

POKEY. (*Tragically*) Desolate is my heart.

MRS. P. (*Too matter of fact*) Well! What are you going to do about it?

POKEY. I have called on the Great Spirit. He is sleeping. He hears me not.

OLD MRS. P.

That is sacrilegious, Pokey
Even at this very moment
By unseen and hidden workings
Surreptitious Fate is weaving
Of the tattered past the future.

POKEY. (*Peevishly*) Then why hasn't the Great Spirit answered me?

OLD MRS. P. (*Glaring at Mrs. P.*)

Because my child, an unbeliever
Dwelleth in our very midst.

MRS. P. Nonsense, I'm a modernist and believe in everything.

OLD MRS. P. To believe in everything is to have faith in nothing.

POKEY. (*Stamping her foot*) Please don't start arguing about religion before lunch. I'm miserable enough as it is.

OLD MRS. P.

Dry your swimming eyes, my daughter
Once before I die I'll summons,
Summons once great Gitchie Gumie.

MRS. P. (*Briskly*) What she needs instead of Gitchie Gumie is good stiff physical exercise and

something to occupy her mind. I'm a modern mother and I know.

OLD MRS. P.

Bid a brave cross three dry faggots
Three dry faggots here before me.

(And HAIL IN THE NOSE comes in and places the faggots before her)

Bid a brave now light the faggots.
When the ritual smoke curls upward
I will call on Gitchie Gumie.

(And WIND IN THE EAR lights the faggots and in a moment the fumes begin to rise)

OLD MRS. P. *(Swaying back and forth)*

Father, father, Gitchie Gumie,
Father, father, Gitchie Gumie.

MRS. P. Mamma, if you keep on rocking like that, you'll be awful ill in a moment.

OLD MRS. P. *(In a ritual ecstasy)*

Father, father, Gitchie Gumie,
Send a cooling draught of surcease
Quench the fire in the bosom
Of the Princess Pocahontas.

(And she begins violently coughing)

MRS. P. Oh, do stop it, mamma. In a minute you'll choke to death.

OLD MRS. P. *(Through her coughs)* Silence, unbeliever! *(And she again begins chanting)*

Father, father, Gitchie Gumie,

For one hundred years and fifty

Faithfully I've called upon you.

MRS. P. Do you expect Gitchie Gumie to believe that. You know you're only a hundred and eight.

OLD MRS. P.

Silence, atheist!

Father, father, Gitchie Gumie,

See the ritual smoke ascending.

(Suddenly from somewhere a strange sound is heard. They all start back)

OLD MRS. P. *(Terribly, speaking like an ancient prophetess)*

The Great Spirit has answered!

(A pause. They all look about frightened, even MRS. P. The noise is repeated)

MRS. P. *(Brutally)* Nonsense! It's only papa snoring.

(And indeed POWHATAN has fallen asleep in the heat of the noon)

POKEY. *(Like a spoiled child)* There now!

OLD MRS. P. *(Still undaunted)* Patience but a moment, childling. *(And then on with the chant)*

Father, father, Gitchie Gumie,

Hear my chanting and give answer.

(A tense silence interrupted by the snores of POWHATAN. And then a twig snaps and then, shrills out the hideous, blood-freezing, hair-lifting, what-we've-been-waiting-for cry

of the Indians; and STORM IN THE EYE and WIND IN THE EAR rush in bearing with them the struggling form of CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH of Virginia)

STORM IN THE EYE. A white man was lurking in the thicket. A white man has come amongst us. The penalty is death.

HAIL IN THE NOSE. (*Dancing frantically about*) The stake! The flame!

WIND IN THE EAR. The edge of the tomahawk shall cleave his scalp. Death to the white man! Death to the white man!

STORM IN THE EYE. Death!

HAIL IN THE NOSE. Death!

(And they dance wildly about him and MRS. P. is vainly attempting to wake up POWHATAN. And old MRS. P., the blood of her fathers awake in her, looks at least ten years younger)

OLD MRS. P. (*Swiftly to POKEY*) The Great Spirit has answered.

POKEY. He is not the one I expected.

OLD MRS. P. Will he not do?

THE THREE BRAVES. (*Shouting at the top of their voices*) Death! Death!

JOHN SMITH. (*Rather bored*) Please don't yell in my ears like that. We're not used to that sort of thing in England.

STORM IN THE EYE. A new scalp for the belt of the Princess Pokey.

(JOHN SMITH is pinned down by the
braves)

POKEY. (*Darkly as she leans over him*) Do you remember me?

JOHN SMITH. Oh, by Jove, yes. Last spring wasn't it?

(*And he glances up at the cliff*)

MRS. P. (*Carelessly*) Oh, kill him and have done with it. I've got to get lunch ready. (*To POWHATAN*) They've taken a white man prisoner.

(*But POWHATAN doesn't stir*)

HAIL IN THE NOSE. How shall he die?

STORM IN THE EYE. By the stake.

WIND IN THE EAR. By the tomahawk.

JOHN SMITH. All I can say is that the whole lot of you are fearfully vindictive.

(*They crowd about him, yelling*)

JOHN SMITH. (*Pushing them aside, bored but magnificent*) No! by St. George, no! I am an Englishman and Englishmen never shall be slaves. (*He strolls over to the edge of the plateau*) Rather than die a prisoner I shall leap to freedom and to death. (*He looks down, then hesitates*) It is rather steep though.

(*But nevertheless he is about to climb over*)

when POKEY rushes to him and holds him tightly in her arms)

MRS. P. Stop that, Pokey. Aren't you ashamed of yourself behaving like that with a perfect stranger.

(Then to the BRAVES)

Hurry up and kill him.

(The three BRAVES drag him back to the centre of the stage and dance around him)

HAIL IN THE NOSE. By the stake!

STORM IN THE EYE. By the tomahawk!

WIND IN THE EAR. By the scalp!

(They are jumping madly about and shrieking and waving their arms in the air)

OLD MRS. P. *(Warmly)* It does my heart good to see the boys having such a good time.

HAIL IN THE NOSE. Death! Death! Death!
Gather the faggots!

STORM IN THE EYE. Keen is the edge of the tomahawk.

(More blood-curdling yells. They grab JOHN SMITH and are about to strap him to a tree)

OLD MRS. P.

Stop, my sons, have you forgotten

Any prisoner caught in August

By the memory of our fathers,

Shall be slain by rock and cudgel.

JOHN SMITH. I say, what's that?

(And she repeats the last line with positive gusto)

OLD MRS. P. Shall be slain by rock and cudgel.

BRAVES. Death!

JOHN SMITH. You must give me a chance to speak before I die. All heroes die speaking.

OLD MRS. P. Bring on the cudgel. That fallen tree will do.

POKEY. *(Aside to OLD MRS. P.)* But he must live.

OLD MRS. P. Wait, my child.

(Whilst STORM IN THE EYE holds JOHN SMITH, HAIL IN THE NOSE and WIND IN THE EAR drag on the fallen tree)

OLD MRS. P. *(Smacking her ancient lips)* And now the boulder.

(They look about for a rock but in vain)

OLD MRS. P. Here take my pillow.

(Imperiously)

Move it out.

(In turn the BRAVES attempt to budge the boulder, but the huge stone is tightly imbedded between the rocks. First one tries then two of them assisted by MRS. P. and all the time POKEY stands watching CAPTAIN SMITH with hungry eyes.)

MRS. P. *(Laconically)* It can't be budged; he'll have to die some other way.

OLD MRS. P. (*Getting up*) Degenerate race of weaklings!

(*And she goes over and rolls out the huge boulder as if it were a butter ball to the centre of the stage*)

OLD MRS. P. Bring the prisoner forth.

MRS. P. (*Vainly shaking POWHATAN*) Papa, don't you want to wake up and see the execution.

(*But POWHATAN doesn't budge*)

OLD MRS. P. Lay the prisoner on the boulder.

JOHN SMITH. After all, it's something to die so picturesquely.

OLD MRS. P. And now the cudgell!

(*He is laid across the rock and STORM IN THE EYE and HAIL IN THE NOSE lift the fallen tree to crush him to death. And at this terrible and memorable moment OLD MRS. P. gives POKEY a shove and the girl magnificently throws herself straight across the captive's body*)

POKEY. (*Her voice thrilling through the ages*)
No! He shall live!

(*TABLEAU. See old prints for details*)

OLD MRS. P. (*Aside*)

History will record her courage
And like always miss the motive

POKEY. (*"Spilling the beans," as the picturesque saying goes*) You shall live and wed me.

JOHN SMITH. What!!!

POKEY. (*Passionately embracing him*)

You will give me eight fierce bravelings
Eight fierce bravelings, my beloved.

(*And then fervently she kisses him*)

Um! Um! Um!

(*And the three BRAVES "let out"—
according to the vernacular — three cheers,
— the first three cheers, by the way, recorded
in American history. But they haven't
reckoned with the CAPTAIN*)

JOHN SMITH. (*Again throwing himself on the
boulder*) No. No. Kill me. Rather a thou-
sand deaths than one anxious female.

(*Again the blood-freezing whoop and the
club is lifted*)

JOHN SMITH. (*With his last breath*) Has the
God of the English deserted me!

(*And at this moment JOHN ROLFE ap-
pears on the cliff's edge, his botany box flung
jauntily over his shoulder. Oblivious to the
tragedy imminent on the plateau he is
specimentizing as he sings the opening lines
of "Drink to Me Only with Thine
Eyes"*)

POKEY. (*Flinging herself again on JOHN
SMITH's body*) He! He! (*And she points to
ROLFE*)

JOHN SMITH. You're smothering me to death,
what's the matter?

POKEY. (*Perhaps, she even winks at him to make her clever intention clearer*) At last!

JOHN SMITH. (*Getting her meaning*) Oh, wily one, if he marries you will you free me?

POKEY. By Gitchie Gumie, I swear it.

JOHN SMITH. (*Yelling at the top of his voice*) Help! Help!

ROLFE. Ra-ther. (*And he leaps from the cliff's edge to the plateau and rushes to his companion's aid and the Indians for a moment start back in amazement*)

ROLFE. Swift, let us fly.

JOHN SMITH. No. We are outmatched.

ROLFE. Then we shall die together.

JOHN SMITH. No. You can save us both.

ROLFE. How?

JOHN SMITH. Like an English gentleman, by keeping your promise.

ROLFE. (*Braver than he dreams*) And by St. George and our good Queen Bess I'll keep my promise. My honour or my life!

JOHN SMITH. Spoken like an English gentleman. (*And they shake hands on it, and then he points to POKEY*) Marry that shrinking damsel and we both go free.

ROLFE. F-r-e-e?

(*And POKEY, the reticent, stands blushing through all her brown*)

JOHN SMITH. (*As ROLFE blanches*) I guar-

antee that what she lacks in delicacy she'll make up in warmth.

(ROLFE trembles)

Remember, English integrity hangs in the balance and after all —

MRS. P. I adore the English, they have such a flow of language.

JOHN SMITH. (*Gloriously*) After all, one wedding is better than two scalps.

JOHN ROLFE. (*Resigned*) I'll do it, but honour comes high.

BRAVES. Rah! Rah! Rah!

POKEY. (*Turning to JOHN SMITH*) There shall be no execution the day I marry.

JOHN ROLFE. (*Dejectedly*) N-o?

MRS. P. (*Genially*) Now isn't that a nice way to settle the whole thing? (*And then urgingly to POKEY*) Come here, darling, don't be timid. Marriage is one third imagination and two thirds keeping your eyes shut. Come, darling.

POKEY. (*Hectically throwing herself into ROLFE's arms*)

You will give me eight fierce bravelings

Eight fierce bravelings, my beloved.

MRS. P. (*Aside to OLD MRS. P.*) She's sure of herself, ain't she?

OLD MRS. P. (*Pleasantly*) Girls will be girls.

MRS. P. (*To POKEY and ROLFE*) And now

you two children go right into the wigwam and let grandma marry you.

(And as POKEY is almost dragging ROLFE after her, JOHN SMITH for a moment stops them)

JOHN SMITH. I say, old man,—I hope you don't mind this momentary inconvenience.

ROLFE. *(The wilted symbol of honour)* N-o,—

JOHN SMITH. *(Slapping him on the back and incidentally sending him a few feet nearer the wigwam)* Right you are, old chap. You know, in a few centuries the whole thing may seem awfully jolly.

(And they all enter the wigwam except POWHATAN who lies delicately sleeping in the fly-hungry noon as the curtain falls on this beautiful legend of POKEY or the Amorous Indian)

THE END

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